

Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE



August 11

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PLUS

Jean-Luc Godard's
'Film Socialisme'

Philip Hoare on
British Folk Cinema

Lee Chang-Dong's
exquisite 'Poetry'

'Marienbad', 'L'avventura'
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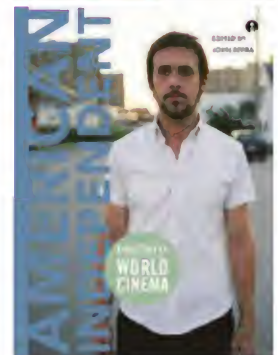
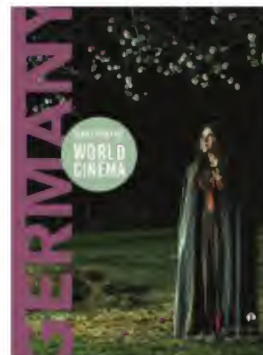
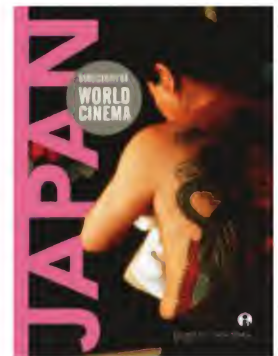
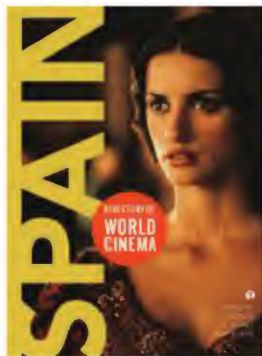


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Welcome. What does it mean to be a modernist? That question inspired many key directors of the early 1960s, and this month Robert Koehler proposes Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (left, and p.42) as a candidate for our 2012 Best Film poll. Alain Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* is also celebrated (see p.26) on its UK rerelease. The other great innovator of the time, Jean-Luc Godard, has made what he says is his last work, *Film Socialisme*, so we've traced the genesis of his aesthetic (p.52). The ATG company (p.48) liberated Japan's best filmmakers from studio orthodoxy, with films such as Matsumoto Toshio's *Funeral Parade of Roses* (far left). Lee Chang-Dong's superb *Poetry* shows that he's back to his best form (p.38). *The Princess of Montpensier* (p.30) sees Bertrand Tavernier pursue his passion for history. But for a true contrast to the modern, try the British folk film collection *Here's a Health to the Barley Mow* (p.32). ➡ **Nick James**

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NICK JAMES AFTER ARISTOTLE



All Hollywood roads seem to lead to the self-cannibalising sequel, the never-ending series – and the film itself as a rag-bag of sight-and sound-bites



Anyone in denial about the creative nadir in which Hollywood currently finds itself mired – or the triumph of financial safe-betting over original new content – should take a look at the UK box-office charts for the

weekend 10-12 June. All the first six places were occupied by sequels: from the top, *Kung Fu Panda 2*, *The Hangover Part II*, *X-Men: First Class*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, *Honey 2* and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules*. Only after these fun-filled retreads did that marvellous archive-reclamation biopic *Senna* claim seventh place.

The knee-jerk thing to say about such a reliance on the familiar is that it's just like the 1980s, when the *Police Academy*, *Rocky*, *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* series ruled the box office (and video had just transformed the industry). Of course, that decade is usually reviled as a low point in cinema history. Alternatively you could say that this is simply another summer in which the hit new films are more or less identical to the old; many of this year's new arrivals, for instance, are drawn from the comic books of the 1960s (*Green Lantern*, *Thor*, *Captain America: The First Avenger*), each with potential sequels no doubt in mind. The cinema has a long and distinguished history of serials, and remakes have also been endemic ever since the technology was created. And since the box-office takings of these top six sequels are strong enough to keep the exhibitors more than happy, what's so different?

Why do the explanations listed above feel like little more than palliatives to the underlying gut feeling that Hollywood is malfunctioning? One clue as to why Hollywood may now be so antipathetic to the idea of the wholly original new film comes from the world of advertising. In an article on his blog 'Canalside View', posted on 7 June, adman Martin Weigel argues that there is a "conflict in working cultures and practices that exists between the storytellers and coders of our industry". Coders, he writes, believe that "code allows us to create a vast and ever-evolving wealth of experiences that simply do not play by... [the screenwriters'] Aristotelean rules [three-act structure etc]. Code allows us to create stuff that's non-linear... experiences that are open-ended... worlds in which we are actors."

The model that Weigel proposes should replace Aristotle's discrete grand narratives involves creating bits of ideas and stories – what he calls "stuff" – that contribute to the brand in a molecular fashion, just as brands themselves are made up of separate but linked concepts or perceptions about the brand. The idea is that these linked components allow for the open-endedness desired by coders. Suppose that similar tensions exist between the CGI coders working in the film industry and the screenwriters. Is it any wonder, then, that in a period of extreme artistic conservatism and aesthetic caution such as this, all Hollywood roads seem to lead to the self-cannibalising sequel, the never-ending series – and the film itself as a rag-bag of sight- and sound-bites?

According to current industry thinking, the consumer, the medium (or platform) and the consumed object are now overlapping and interacting concepts. In that sense, the film equivalent of advertising's brand is the franchise with its attendant fansites and ripped tribute filmlets. But if brandism is today's equivalent of auteurism – the thread that links the creative components – the example of Ridley Scott's forthcoming *Prometheus* reveals some of the weaknesses of this approach.

Scott and his people are taking great pains to insist that *Prometheus* is not a prequel to *Alien*, even though it obviously is. That's because the *Alien* franchise or brand has been exhausted by knock-offs (such as, say, *Alien vs. Ninja* or *AVPR: Aliens vs Predator – Requiem*). In other words, Scott wants his film to avoid the perception that it's part of a franchise – while simultaneously launching a new one. So maybe the discrete art object or film isn't finished after all? Or is the truth more sinister: that franchises are going underground to regain the cachet of lost originality?

Amanda Lipman (1961-2011)

It is with great sadness that we note the untimely death of Amanda Lipman, a regular contributor to our Reviews pages in the 1990s. Her writing was marked by an incisive yet humane intelligence, which served her well in her subsequent career as a psychotherapist. Earlier, as Cinema Editor and then Editor of the London listings magazine *City Limits*, she played an instrumental role in launching the film-writing careers of several key *Sight & Sound* contributors, myself included. She will be greatly missed.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIAN ANDERSON ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON COOPER AT WWW.COOPERHILL.COM

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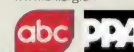
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Rushes

News, opinion, festivals and coming events

THE BIGGER PICTURE



Blonde ambition

Appropriately enough, given the way his name has become so linked to the glamour of old Hollywood, it was an encounter with Marlene Dietrich in 1958 that set the then 18-year-old John Kobal on the path that would make him the most celebrated and inveterate collector of Hollywood stills and ephemera. The meeting

confirmed the young man's fascination with the magic and mystique of Hollywood stardom.

Kobal went on to befriend many of the veterans of Hollywood's golden age, from Mae West to Tallulah Bankhead, using his charm to acquire a vast collection of material, which continues to be made available through the Kobal

Collection – whose credit today invariably graces just about any documentary or book on Hollywood history. 'Glamour of the Gods' – an exhibition of selections from Kobal's collection, including the above image of Dietrich on the set of 'Manpower' (1941) – is at London's National Portrait Gallery, 7 July to 23 October.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LASZLO WILLINGER © JOHN KOBAL FOUNDATION, 2011

Vision quest

Robert Breer's lifelong experiments with film intrigue **Ian Francis**

"Please be aware of your immediate surroundings at all times," reads a laminated card at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art's Robert Breer exhibition in Gateshead. It's the work of a health-and-safety official made sleepless by Breer's motion sculptures (or 'floats'), an armada of blobs, pillars and walls that roam the gallery at less than snail's pace, keeping invigilators and visitors on their toes. It'd serve just as well as a motto for Breer, an artist who hovers up the minutiae of the world around him – and whose work makes us continually conscious of our own watching.

Born in Detroit into a family of engineers, Breer escaped to Paris and a foray into abstract expressionism in the late 1940s. Soon impatient with working on canvas, he looked for an open end beyond the 'absolute statement' of painting; thanks to a Bolex borrowed from his cine-enthusiast father, he found it in film. The early series of *Form Phases* (1952–54) marshals blocks and lines around the screen in a clunky dance that never fully resolves itself, always butting at the edges of the frame or creating new frames. Thus began Breer's 50-year filmmaking journey, littered with innovations and gear changes, but always somehow retaining the self-taught simplicity of those early experiments.

The essential ingredient is an endless supply of 6"x4" index cards, the canvas for sequences of doodles and patterns that can be dashed off in the studio or out and about (Breer has been known to knock up a temporary lightbox in his hotel room using a drawer and a sheet of glass). During the editing process he makes sense – and nonsense – of these sequences, shuffling the cards and varying the pace to create a cascade of images that will occasionally promise to settle before flying off in another direction. There is a rare nod to plot in the title of *A Man and His Dog out for Air* (1957), but only towards the end do the eponymous characters materialise – and even then they are constantly in danger of turning into something else.

This world of constant metamorphosis can be traced back to animation pioneers such as Winsor McCay, Max Fleischer and Emile Cohl, filmmakers high on the transformative power of the medium and unwilling to tether their characters to reality. (Breer is



PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER MOOR

Breer's challenge is to the continual forward locomotion of cinema. 'It's a delusion to think we're getting anywhere'

also a big fan of Jean Vigo, who shared his hungry eye and love of chaos.) Breer would claim that he ended up in a similar place simply by working out techniques from scratch; his main wellspring of inspiration has always been the optical trickery of pre-cinema, manifested at the Baltic by a series of flip-books and Mutoscopes that are just begging to be cranked into life. The pleasure lies not just in the tactile but in the foregrounding of cinema's mechanics: "The hat should be transparent and show the rabbit."

Breer's challenge is to the continual forward locomotion of cinema ("It's a delusion to think that we're getting anywhere"), and to the visual homogeneity that story can create by picking out particular figures within the frame. To get anything from a single-frame barrage such as *Recreation* (1956) or *Fist Fight* (1964), we have to let go and just look. Stan Brakhage was a contemporary, and in some respects they aimed for the same ocular enrichment (or *Eyewash*, as one of Breer's titles has it). The visual was paramount, and both were wary of diluting the image with sound. But while most of Brakhage's films are made to be viewed in reverent silence, Breer worried that the total absence of sound would put the viewer on edge. If you stand in the middle of his exhibition you will hear a fluctuating aural stew of *musique concrète*, squawking chickens, Dadaist poetry and radio noise.

While tugging playfully against the images, these home-recorded soundtracks also tend to root the films in the world they emerge from.

After periods of geometry, cartooning and collage, Breer developed a stronger autobiographical slant to his work during the 1970s. Always interested in jumping between two and three dimensions, he was able to blur the boundaries further after his discovery of rotoscoping, which allowed him to turn cine footage into impressionistic sketches.

Move up to the second floor of the gallery and you're confronted by the floats, another of Breer's strategies for keeping things fresh. Starting out with little styrofoam blocks that patrolled New York happenings in the mid-1960s, Breer ended up creating a fleet of huge fibreglass domes for the Pepsi Pavilion at Osaka's World Exposition in 1970. For Breer they offered another level of open-endedness beyond painting and film – and a chance to exercise his engineering nous.

Around the edges of the exhibition you can see his later films, restless blazes of colour and ideas increasingly concerned with home, family and memory. Death pops up on a regular basis, in the form of a derailed train, a spinning gravestone, or – in *Bang!* (1986) – a very self-conscious fade to black. "WHAZZAT? FADE OUT?" comes the riposte. One thing is clear: Breer is still resisting the forward march towards oblivion.

■ The Robert Breer exhibition is at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, until 25 September

● **Leos Carax** is preparing to shoot 'Holly Motors' – his first feature since 'Pola X' 12 years ago – with frequent collaborator Denis Lavant. Details of the project are still sketchy, but seem to incorporate fantasy and shifting identities, with Lavant reportedly playing a killer who travels between different lives, appearing as a man, a woman, young, old, poor, rich...

● **Warren Beatty** is to return to filmmaking to make his long-rumoured biopic about Howard Hughes, which he first talked about making as far back as the early 1970s. Thirteen years after he directed his last film 'Bulworth', and a decade after he starred in the disastrous 'Town & Country', Beatty will reportedly write, direct and star in the Hughes film, with other cast members rumoured to include Jack Nicholson, Alec Baldwin, Andrew Garfield, Evan Rachel Wood and Beatty's wife, Annette Bening. The announcement follows rumours that Beatty may also be reviving the Dick Tracy character – though with a younger actor playing Tracy.

● **Anton Corbijn** is to adapt John le Carré's terrorism thriller 'A Most Wanted Man'. The story follows a British man who helps a Chechen Muslim targeted by the US, British and German secret services. The film follows on the heels of 'Let the Right One In' director Tomas Alfredson's adaptation of le Carré's 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy', which is due out this autumn.

● **Lu Chuan**, the Chinese director of the well-received 'City of Life and Death', is at work on 'The Last Supper', an epic story about two generals, Liu Bang and Xiang Yu, at war at the end of the Qin dynasty. Lu is also contributing a short to 'Shanghai, I Love You', a portmanteau film from the producer of the similarly structured 'New York, I Love You' and 'Paris, je t'aime'. Other contributors include Jim Sheridan and Gabriele Muccino.

● **Olivier Assayas** (below) is to follow 'Carlos' with the political drama 'Something in the Air', which he will direct from his own script. The film is set in France, the UK and Italy in the 1970s, and reportedly centres on a student finding his way in a world of post-1968 left-wing ideologies, while harbouring frustrated artistic ambitions.



The thrill of the chase

Kieron Corless savours an animal-themed programme at the Oberhausen festival

One of the stand-out strands at this year's edition of the long-running festival dedicated to experimental short films was a historical survey of the animal film. An obvious idea, perhaps, but it was assembled with a lot of care and thought by biologist/philosopher Cord Riechermann and curator/filmmaker Marcel Schwierin, drawing on both science and artistic films with an eye to their different approaches and sensibilities. One underlying impetus was the fact that the spread of zoos coincided with the emergence of cinemas in industrialised nations.

With a sprawling choice of 11 programmes divided thematically, it was really a case of lucky dip. The second in the series, on hunting, was the most satisfyingly layered and stimulating of the ones I managed to see, showcasing eye-opening films from the colonial era juxtaposed with the likes of Peter Kubelka's blackly subversive and brilliantly edited home-movie exposé *Our African Trip* (*Unsere Afrikareise*, 1966). Each film was strong enough to stand alone, but rubbing up against each other gave an impression of intriguing cross-



Unfair game: 'Schwalben am Spiess' (1958), one of a programme of hunting shorts

fertilisation and a coherent argument.

That said, possibly the most riveting animal film in the festival was by the subject of another strand, Polish director Grzegorz Królikiewicz: *Go! (Idź)* (1989), in which a horse is led up a mountain by its devoted owner and killed as an offering, in a bizarre local ritual. In March *S&S* reviewed a Królikiewicz DVD box-set, and on this evidence he's right up there with the greats of Polish cinema, with his own idiosyncratic, highly charged and often disorientating film language, which at its best is utterly exhilarating. Just discovering his work made the trip worthwhile.

As if that weren't enough, there

was also an opportunity to see a proper projection of a film I'd long coveted: Fred Halsted's 1972 *LA Plays Itself* (from which Thom Andersen borrowed the title for his later essay film). This was part of the programme dedicated to and put together by the polymath William E. Jones, a Los Angeles-based filmmaker, curator, researcher and restorer who showed not only his own fascinating work, but also a selection of films he's been inspired and obsessed by.

It was hard not to be inspired in turn by Halsted's film, which starts in relaxed, natural-idyll mode with two men enjoying an al fresco encounter, before shifting into more intense

psychosexual dynamics within the city. Among many other things, it's about as vivid a portrait of early-1970s LA as I've seen on screen. The other highlight of this programme was Luther Price's *Sodom* (1989), a mesmerising, rapidly edited assemblage of male bodies in the throes of sexual ecstasy, intercut with a strange, ritualised subterranean party lit by fire.

Of the new work, the Fipresci prize-winner *Handebol* by young Brazilian director Anita Rocha da Silveira was a smart evocation of the lives of teenage girls. I was also struck by *Traces of an Elephant*, a sombre revisiting of the Alan Clarke masterpiece *Elephant* by Vanessa Nica Mueller, who won the prize for best German film. The stand-out for me, though, was *Mercúrio* by Portuguese director Sandro Aguiar, which shared second prize in the main competition. A man and a woman meet up in a wood, observed through the windows of a car, which layers reflection on reflection until inside becomes outside and vice versa. Shot in just five hours, *Mercúrio* is something of a miracle. Aguiar already has one feature under his belt, 2008's magisterial *Uprise (A Zona)*, but with Portugal in financial disarray, who knows when the money will be forthcoming for another?

THE NUMBERS

Driving force

Charles Gant watches Asif Kapadia's 'Senna' blaze a trail in UK cinemas

When director Asif Kapadia started editing archive footage for his Ayrton Senna film back in the autumn of 2008, the theatrical market for documentary features was looking decidedly rocky. Between 2003 and 2005, there had been a mini surge at the box office, with titles such as *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *March of the Penguins*, *Touching the Void*, *Super Size Me* and *Etre et avoir* punching through. But then came the fallow years, with a proliferation of titles – many concerning the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the financial crisis and environmental calamity – drawing decidedly modest audiences. (Honourable exceptions: *Man on Wire* and *An Inconvenient Truth*.)

This context makes the current

success of *Senna* (£2.16m in its first 18 days) all the more heartening. Unexpected, likewise, is the sudden boom for documentaries that we are now witnessing, with *TT3D: Closer to the Edge* joining *Senna* in the £1m-plus bracket, and *Pina* and *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* both past £600,000.

Although *Senna*'s marketing and distribution plans were well in place when *TT3D* opened in May, says Universal UK boss Niels Swinkels, and the two motor sports films are "different beasts", the success "gave us confidence that something as niche as this could do significant amounts of box office".

Formula 1, Universal knew, is massively popular, and there's a big UK audience for motor sport and the BBC's *Top Gear*. But, says Swinkels, "There was still a question mark whether you can get those people to see a documentary in cinemas." The same could be said about the

desire of the upscale audience that traditionally embraces docs to see a film about a long-deceased Brazilian racing-car driver.

The dichotomy between those two audiences slid sharply into focus when it came to deploying Jeremy Clarkson's "completely unmissable" endorsement in the marketing. As Swinkels tactfully says, "Jeremy is such a voice for motor-sports enthusiasts, but not per se for arthouse lovers. It was an interesting debate about where that would work and where it wouldn't."

Universal dated *Senna* for release on 3 June, the middle of the Grand Prix season, but on a weekend with no race. Results were strong in traditional sites for documentary (the film took more than £50,000 at its top venue, London's Curzon Soho, during the first two weeks), but also in multiplexes near what the distributor had identified as

Top ten documentaries at the UK box office

| Film | Year | Gross |
|------------------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Fahrenheit 9/11</i> | 2004 | \$6,902,552 |
| <i>March of the Penguins</i> | 2005 | \$3,314,336 |
| <i>Touching the Void</i> | 2003 | \$2,660,445 |
| <i>Deep Sea 3D</i> | 2006 | \$2,423,753 |
| <i>Senna*</i> | 2011 | \$2,163,003 |
| <i>Ghosts of the Abyss</i> | 2003 | \$1,737,547 |
| <i>Bowling for Columbine</i> | 2002 | \$1,667,625 |
| <i>TT3D*</i> | 2011 | \$1,186,863 |
| <i>Super Size Me</i> | 2004 | \$1,111,093 |
| <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> | 2006 | \$935,770 |

Excludes concert films. * gross to 21 June

the "Formula 1 corridor" through the heart of England. Showcase Bluewater and Cineworld Milton Keynes were notably strong.

Expansion on week two to 122 cinemas, and week three to 185, has taken *Senna* into many sites that rarely play non-fiction. A one-off "Senna day" saw it screen in 357 locations, the widest-ever reach for a non-concert documentary in the UK.

Bridge too far

A model of adaptation, 'Across the Bridge' cleverly expands Graham Greene's original short story, says the screenwriter Paul Mayersberg

The screenplay of *Across the Bridge* (1957) was, the director Ken Annakin has said, largely the work of Guy Elmes (1920-1998). It is a superb film and a master lesson in the vaguely criminal craft of film adaptation. Graham Greene's 1938 short story consists of the observations and guesswork of an unnamed narrator about a crooked fugitive financier named Joseph Calloway in a small town on the Texas-Mexico border, where he is planning to escape across the bridge between the two countries. He is a wretched, venal character whose only sign of humanity is his grudging affection for a stray dog. Cynical in the extreme, Greene concludes: "Only one more indication of a human being's capacity for self-deception, our baseless optimism that is so much more appalling than our despair."

In the film the Englishman Calloway becomes Carl Schaffner, a German with a British passport, played by an American (Rod Steiger) (The name Calloway had also been used for the Trevor Howard character in *The Third Man* where, in a reversal of identity, he was the hunter of a criminal on the run.) We meet Schaffner in his London office, making his desperate escape before arrest, aiming for Mexico, from where he cannot be extradited. This scene is not in Greene's story. While the situation may look forward to Enron-Madoff models of our time, Steiger has the demeanour of a Nazi war criminal on the run, an echo of Orson Welles's character in *The Stranger* (1946).

Schaffner takes a train to avoid being on an air passenger list. Crossing America he meets, by chance or destiny, a man with the not dissimilar name Scarff (Bill Nagy), whom he murders on impulse to steal his identity. This scene is not in the story either, yet it is as Greene-like as anything Greene wrote. Steiger and Nagy's flawless performances mirror each other, while Annakin's Hitchcockian editing gives the murder and disposal of the body a sensuality that looks forward to Patricia Highsmith's *Ripley's Game*, as filmed by Liliana Cavani in 2002, with John Malkovich (another neglected work).

When Schaffner arrives at the border town, he finds that Scarff is



Nowhere to run: Rod Steiger as the fugitive Carl Schaffner in 'Across the Bridge'

also a wanted man on the run – again, a twist not in the original story. The homosexual duality explicit in Highsmith and Hitchcock, covert in Welles and Joseph Cotten in *The Third Man*, forms no part of Steiger's performance; Schaffner's wife has, we learn, committed suicide. Steiger conveys an uncontrollable erotic power born of frustration, greed and revenge; he's a man who possesses and devours people – which may be the subversive impulse in writers who are drawn to the subject of identity theft.

When I saw the film at the age of 16, the seed may have been sown for my protagonist in *Croupier* (1997): a man who writes his own double life, stealing from other characters as he goes, to become one of the thieving cheats he despises. I have long been intrigued by films that make us complicit with criminals.

While the plots of identity-swap films – mostly spy stories and comedies – are inevitably similar, the performances of the actors in them can be very different. Perhaps because

Steiger gives it an expressionist feel uncharacteristic of English movies

of their divided personae, they seem to become their own rewriters. When Schaffner arrives at the town, he finds it already peopled with characters as corrupt as he. Outwardly uneasy, he is actually at home in this Dante-esque purgatory. Seldom has a town in the sun felt so dark. Orson Welles might perhaps have played Schaffner more sympathetically than Steiger but with less truth – had he not been too busy that year in his own border town in *Touch of Evil*. Steiger's Schaffner is a cousin of Harry Lime, trying and failing to escape his no man's land by bridge instead of by sewer.

Parallels with *The Passenger* (1974) have been remarked on, and it's possible that film's English screenwriters, Mark Peploe and Peter Wollen, had seen Annakin's film.

What the papers said

"Annakin's direction has seldom been so competent, though the Clouzot-like relish he brings to the more unpleasant scenes is sometimes disturbing. He seems to have been able to do little to subdue Rod Steiger, whose performance is as studied, self-conscious and contrived as the script."

Derek Hill, 'Sight & Sound', Autumn 1957

"Some English critics regard ['Across the Bridge'] as their best thriller since 'The Third Man'. If the film had sustained the tension of its opening scenes the comparison might be apt, but the middle of the picture... falls apart."

Pauline Kael, from '5001 Nights at the Movies'



But whereas Antonioni's road movie seems to dream Jack Nicholson as the reporter of uncertainty, hovering between sleep and waking, *Across the Bridge* has Rod Steiger kick, bully and cheat his own narrative, powerful and powerless at the same time. Steiger gives the film an expressionist feel uncharacteristic of English movies at the time.

Shot in Spain, *Across the Bridge* has an atmosphere of alienation, with an American lead, an Italian lady (Marla Landi), a Canadian (David Knight) and English actors like Noel Willman playing Mexicans, not always convincingly; there's a whiff of post-war European cinema about it, Italian in its obliviousness to nationalities.

The true female lead, indeed the love interest, arrives without a passport as a dog named Dolores, owned by the dead Scarff, adopted reluctantly by Schaffner to preserve his new identity. Referred to in the story as "the hateful dog", Dolores is a brilliant departure. A sweet femme fatale who saves Schaffner's life by waking him in the presence of a deadly scorpion, she becomes both his physical nemesis and his human salvation. Related to the old man's dog, Flick, in *Umberto D.* (1952), Dolores is also an heir to the friend of the hunted Jean Gabin in *Quai des brumes* (1938), where it is the master who lives and dies like a dog. Scarff must have had a vestige of good in him, which through Dolores is transferred to Schaffner – an optimistic variation on the Hitchcockian transference of guilt. *Across the Bridge* is a fully realised vision – a haunted, sorrowful pattern of a world gone to the bad.

So why did the film disappear? It was a commercial success for Rank at the time, and got excellent notices. Perhaps it was because Annakin was not seen as an auteur; perhaps because Steiger was an actor not a star; or perhaps it simply slipped through the revival net. Happily *Across the Bridge* is now available as a DVD on the ITV label, but it really deserves to be seen on the big screen.

A year earlier Annakin had directed *Loser Takes All*, scripted by Greene himself, and before that Elmes had co-written *The Stranger's Hand* (Mario Soldati, 1954) from a Greene treatment – with Trevor Howard and Alida Valli, no less! All those bridges: magpie writers and directors like to call it borrowing, whereas they are really stealing from their other selves.

Paul Mayersberg's screenplays include 'The Man Who Fell to Earth' (1976), 'Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence' (1983), 'Eureka' (1983) and 'Croupier' (1997)

The Way of the West

Not to be confused with the Clint Eastwood film of the same name, 'The Unforgiven' (1960) – playing in this month's MGM HD Westerns season – is no less thought-provoking. One of the more intriguing films in the long directing career of the legendary John Huston, it tackles uncomfortable issues about racial intolerance – issues that were approaching boiling point in US society at the time. 'The Unforgiven' is based on a 1957 novel by Alan



LeMay, who also wrote the source novel for John Ford's 'The Searchers'.

Like Ford's better-known classic, 'The Unforgiven' uses the presence of a young woman living away from her birth family to examine racial prejudice. Where in 'The Searchers' Natalie Wood played a white girl seized by the Comanche, in 'The Unforgiven' Audrey Hepburn plays an Indian girl, Rachel, who is adopted by Mattilda Zachary (Lillian Gish). Rachel is raised peacefully alongside Gish's three sons (western regulars Burt Lancaster, Audie Murphy and Doug McClure), but when the whispers begin that she is Indian, a storm of bigotry and violence is unleashed – the attacks coming both from the family's white neighbours, and from the Indians who threaten their ranch.

In a departure from her more familiar roles in sophisticated romantic comedies, Audrey Hepburn more than holds her own against a gallery of rugged western men. With Franz Planer's magnificent Panavision cinematography and a stirring score by Dimitri Tiomkin, of 'High Noon' fame, it's an unusual but compelling angle on life in the Old West.

Western Season, 15–28 August 2011

'The Unforgiven' is showing on 28 August as part of MGM HD's Western season – a diverse selection including 'Hang 'Em High' (right), 'The Indian Fighter', 'Vera Cruz', a trio of 'Sabata' spaghetti westerns and many more. Movies screen at 8pm each night from 15–28 August. MGM HD is a 24-hour film channel (Sky 313), available both within the Sky Movies Dual HD pack and as an à la carte channel for £5 a month. For more details see www.mgmhd.co.uk. To subscribe, please call: 08442 415161.

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Also in August 'A Fistful of Film' – a special MGM HD outdoor western extravaganza, with food, activities, music and culminating in an open-air screening of the Clint Eastwood classic 'A Fistful of Dollars'. Location: Walpole Park, Ealing Time: doors open 5:30pm; movie starts at 8.30pm Over 15s only Tickets: £3, payable on the door Visit www.mgmhd.co.uk/fistfuloffilm

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Uphill struggle

James Mottram finds Edinburgh feeling the pain in the wake of funding cuts

It's all too sadly appropriate that two of this year's major sponsors of the Edinburgh International Film Festival were EasyJet and Smart Cars. Budget, cut-price, scaled-down, reduced in size – however you term it, the EIFF has dramatically suffered from crippling funding cuts (some £1.9 million) and personnel change. In truth, new artistic director James Mulligan, formerly of filmmaker network Shooting People, made the best of the almost impossible task handed to him – but the gloom that enveloped a festival now in its 65th year was palpable.

With the delegate centre moving from the plush Point Hotel to the faded grandeur of the Teviot building on Bristo Square, the numbers spoke for themselves. Just 62 UK premieres, compared to 106 last year, simply meant less talent, less press and little buzz. Distributors withheld hot titles, notably Artificial Eye with *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (despite the presence of festival patron Tilda Swinton in the cast). And those who came found a festival without red-carpet events or even a closing film to speak of, although at the eleventh hour Disney

stumped up the 3D premiere of *The Lion King* for the penultimate day.

Moreover, facing stiff competition from February's expanding Glasgow Film Festival, there was a real sense that Edinburgh has lost its identity. Little wonder, then, that this end-of-days feeling was reflected in the films. David Mackenzie's ragged *Perfect Sense* – a “Blindness for dummies”, as one colleague dubbed it – sees Eva Green and Ewan McGregor lose their sense of taste (both literally and metaphorically). Faring little better was Xavier Gens's nihilistic *The Divide*, a hate-filled chamber piece set in the aftermath of a nuclear attack (it prompted numerous walkouts in the screening I attended). Only Nicolás Goldbart's debut *Phase 7*, an Argentine tale about a quarantined apartment block, had any fun with the impending apocalypse.

Among those critics who did make it to Edinburgh, however, there was a feeling that the films on offer were up to scratch. David Hare's finely crafted political thriller *Page Eight* may be scheduled for a BBC transmission in August, but this story of a senior MI5 official (Bill Nighy) who finds himself entangled in a web of cover-ups more than merited a big-screen showing. Also receiving a world premiere was *Albatross*, Niall MacCormick's crowd-pleaser about a bullish would-be



Critically divisive: Xavier Gens's post-nuclear chamber piece, 'The Divide'

writer (Jessica Brown Findlay) and her friendship with the naive daughter (Felicity Jones) of two guest-house owners. And I had a soft spot for *Tomboy*, Céline Sciamma's follow-up to 2007's *Water Lilies*, about a French girl who fools her new friends into thinking she's a boy.

With the recent move of the Sheffield International Documentary Festival to June, the EIFF took the wise decision to offer several joint UK premieres. This allowed a screening of James Marsh's *Project Nim*, a heartbreaking tale of chimpanzee experimentation that was also part of the festival's best strand, 'Reel Science'. Here guest speakers were invited to lead discussions following screenings of films both old and new; most illuminating was Edinburgh

University's professor of human cognitive neuroscience, Sergio Della Sala, deconstructing *Memento*.

What didn't work, however, was the idea of guest curators: filmmakers including Sophie Fiennes and Jim Jarmusch were invited to programme films, but most of them didn't actually attend the festival. There's little intrinsic interest in Gus Van Sant programming Derek Jarman's *Blue* and *The Last of England* if he's not actually there to explain his choices. Symptomatic of the patchwork nature of the festival – much of it felt as if it had been thrown together at the last minute – it simply suggests that a radical rethink is required for 2012. Otherwise this often vibrant event in the film calendar is in danger of stalling for good.

ON SET

Behind closed doors

Peter Strickland is following 'Katalin Varga' with a change of scale, finds Kieron Corless

Visiting the set of Peter Strickland's new film 'Berberian Sound Studio' (recently shot in East London's Three Mills), I can't help but be struck by contrasts. The first is immediately obvious: Strickland's breakthrough 2009 feature 'Katalin Varga' sourced much of its power from the wide open Transylvanian landscapes where its hypnotic rape-revenge tragedy played out; his follow-up unfolds almost entirely in claustrophobic interiors, including the perfect simulacrum of a 1970s sound studio where today's scene is being shot.

Between takes, Strickland finesses

matters in his trademark dapper three-piece suit, which he's apparently sported every day of the four-week shoot. An atmosphere of harmony prevails, in stark contrast to the combustible dynamics in the scene I watch on the monitor. Set in the 1970s, the film follows Gilderoy (Toby Jones), an introverted sound mixer living with his mum in Dorking, of all places, who relocates to Italy to supervise sound effects on a sleazy horror film. Let's just say that things start to unravel there, and the thin line between reality and illusion is breached. In fact

the long synopsis I've been given is one of the most mind-bendingly imaginative I've read for some time, and the temporal and psychological disorientations alone suggesting that cult status is a foregone conclusion.

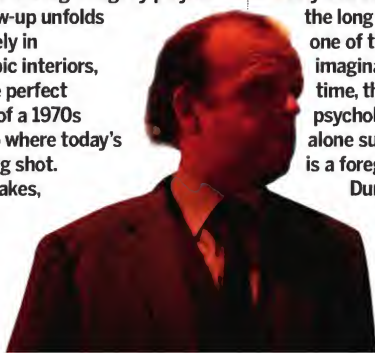
During lunch Strickland talks

about the 'giallo' films that have influenced him, especially their groundbreaking soundtracks. But 'Berberian Sound Studio' is no pastiche – it has the feel of something sui generis. When discussing 'Katalin Varga', critics often brought up Bergman's 'The Virgin Spring' (1960), but in truth Strickland forged his own path in that film, through pitch-perfect control of mood, atmosphere and texture. Mention should be made as well of another key difference between that last film and this one. Unable to secure production funding, Strickland made 'Katalin Varga' outside the system, enabling critics to paint him as a romantic renegade. Its success opened doors, and he's clearly happy to be on the inside now, this venture co-produced by Warp and Illuminations, and part-funded by the former UKFC (now berthed at the BFI). This time there's just south of £1 million in the bank, and a top-notch crew in place

to help realise his new vision. Proud as he is of 'Katalin Varga', Strickland practically shudders as he recalls the near-insuperable difficulties he had bringing it to fruition.

Who knows how this one will turn out? The scene I witnessed was enticing, but ultimately it's impossible to second-guess Strickland's overall visual design. And, given the profession of the protagonist, much of the film's impact will derive from the soundtrack, which is being overseen by cult band Broadcast. 'Berberian Sound Studio' will hopefully debut in Berlin next year, where the Silver Bear success of 'Katalin Varga' launched Strickland's career in 2009; a fuller report plus interview will run in 'Sight & Sound' to coincide with the film's UK release.

A few weeks after the set visit I run into one of the executives on the film, who's just viewed the first edit. "It's like nothing you've ever seen before," she tells me. I'm already hooked.



Sound man: Toby Jones

The three o'clock rite

Lena Bergman remembers the viewing habits of her father Ingmar Bergman in his unique private cinema, a converted barn on Fårö, the Baltic island where he lived until his death in 2007

The movies enjoyed by my father, Ingmar Bergman, every day at three o'clock in his private cinema on the island of Fårö were often old black-and-white classics, well-remembered ones as well as forgotten ones. Stepping through the rust-coloured door of the barn – leaving the blinding Fårö light for the embracing gloom of the cinema – is a special experience. At first, the darkness seems compact. You grope your way to your seat, sit down and let your eyes adjust to the sparse light. Now the huge tapestry depicting *The Magic Flute* on Fårö slowly emerges. One August evening in 1974, beneath a full moon, Ingmar's opera film *The Magic Flute* had its very first screening in the old barn, whose transformation into a cinema had just been completed.

In his essay collection *Balladiner*, J.M.G. Le Clézio describes the moon, lit by the sun, as being the prototypical film projector – and the darkness of night might be a first camera obscura lit by other worlds. Light and darkness are the prerequisites for film, and guess what – on the tapestry a moon is floating in a pale, mysterious light. We also behold the Queen of the Night, white-breasted and dressed in black, brandishing her knife. Here in this cinema, the Queen of the Night reigns – but over there is the wise Sarastro, who has made a pact with the sun and the light. So we find ourselves in the presence of both these opposite forces.

I have tried to calculate the

number of hours that Ingmar must have spent in his cinema watching movies – sitting, or rather lying, in the armchair in the front row, his feet on the footstool.

Imagine: every day after his noon nap, Ingmar would get into his red jeep and arrive at his cinema just before three o'clock. He would spend two hours there. (The exception was Saturday, when the screening started at two o'clock.)

A movie six days a week, from May to October, for roughly 30 years; in addition, for three days a week throughout July he would invite his large family, who would be staying on Fårö, to evening screenings. He may have spent around 8,000 hours in his cinema. Little wonder, then, that Ingmar's presence can be felt there.

On 14 May 1944, Ingmar set up a rented film projector at home in the Stockholm suburb of Abrahamsberg, where he occupied a tiny two-room flat with my mother, dancer Else Fisher. (She thoroughly documented this event in her diary.) He was 25 and on the rise. They watched Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), Murnau's *Faust* (1926) and Chaplin's *Easy Street* (1917). "Fun!" my mother noted in her diary (though renting a projector and film wasn't cheap). Having your own cinema – is that as enjoyable as having your own puppet theatre? As being able to open up your magic box whenever you like?

Ingmar welcomed people to share a movie experience with him in the way that others (normal people) invite their friends over for a meal. Dinners with Ingmar were rare, but sharing a film with him meant an invitation to get together. And often to talk – there were light-hearted and often lengthy post-cinema conversations in the sheltering gloom of the barn. Ingmar often joked about the cinema being a therapist's couch.

The screening always adhered to a special ritual. If there were many of



We would gather at the blue bench by the wall of the barn. Ingmar was almost always the first to arrive

us attending, we would gather at the blue bench by the wall of the barn. Ingmar was almost always the first to arrive, sitting there waiting for us. Hugs. "Well then, shall we go in?" There would be light-hearted talk (about who'd got tick bites) as your eyes readjusted into cinema mode, and a short presentation of the film at hand. Sometimes we were issued with a neatly handwritten note listing the week's films.

"I take no responsibility whatsoever for this film – you are here at your own risk," Ingmar would say, sinking down in his armchair beneath his spread-out leather jacket,

raising an arm to let Ingalill – his right-hand woman and projectionist – see his rotating finger. The gesture so admired by his grandchildren – the gesture that means that the lights can go down, the projector can start up and the film can begin.

Rules of engagement

The three o'clock cinema was thus an institution. There were rules, of course (both explicit and implicit):

1. Punctuality

Everyone is familiar with Ingmar's penchant for punctuality.

2. Continuity

Going to the movies on rainy days alone, or just watching especially interesting films, was out of the question. So was spending sunny days on the beach, or choosing to skip the more challenging films. What you needed, in short, was obsessive cinematic dedication. (Perhaps this dedication also included getting close to a father who had previously been absent from our lives, but that's another matter.)

3. Willingness

Ingmar often told us it pained him to see how Liv Ullmann's dachshund expressly revealed its boredom with a film. In other words, you weren't allowed to get bored or fall asleep.



Birthday treat: 'The Circus,' Bergman's favourite Chaplin film



Childlike pleasure: 'The General' was another well-loved Fårö film

BETSTILLAS POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

Gunnar Fischer



18 November 1910
– 11 June 2011

Against the brow of a hill and under a storm-laden sky, the grim reaper leads his followers

on "a solemn dance away to the dark country". This image at the end of 'The Seventh Seal' (1957) is one of the most famous in all of Ingmar Bergman's work. It was largely thanks to his cinematographer Gunnar Fischer that the sequence was captured at all. He was the one who, late in the day, saw the clouds coming in and persuaded crew members to dress up in the film's characters' costumes and perform the dance of death. (The actors had already gone home by the time the scene was shot.)

Fischer occupies a curious position in Bergman's story. Ask many Bergman enthusiasts the identity of Bergman's DP and they are likely to answer: Sven Nykvist. Bergman himself talked of his "special relation" and "marvellous rapport" with Nykvist. Meanwhile, in his autobiography 'The Magic Lantern', he mentions Fischer only in passing – and then to describe how the cinematographer was replaced by Gösta Roosling on Bergman's first film as director, 'Crisis' (1945).

The films that established the Swedish auteur's international reputation, however, were all shot by Fischer. 'Summer Interlude' (1950) and 'Summer with Monika' (1952), with their balmy imagery of the great Swedish outdoors, were both his work. And Fischer was versatile: he shot the country-house drama 'Smiles of a Summer Night' (1955) and 'Wild Strawberries' (1957), with its eerie Giorgio de Chirico-like dream sequence of the professor alone in the deserted town.

It was Fischer's camera that captured Max von Sydow as the mercurial 19th-century mesmerist

Vogler in 'The Magician' (1958), and medieval-era Sweden in 'The Seventh Seal'. He was also the DP on those playful and formally adventurous commercials Bergman made for the soap manufacturer Bris during the Swedish film strike in the early 1950s.

The cinematographer provided a link with the film that arguably influenced Bergman more than any other, Victor Sjöström's 'The Phantom Carriage' (1921) – shot by Julius Jaenzon, who later became Fischer's mentor.

Fischer may not have received the credit that was due for his work on these movies, but his collaboration with Bergman still defined his career. Scan through his filmography and (although he had also worked on Carl Dreyer's Swedish-set 'Two People' in 1945) the titles that leap out are still the Bergman classics. The reasons why he stopped working with the director after 'The Devil's Eye' (1960), one of Bergman's slightest and most superficial films, remain murky. Fischer himself suggested self-deprecatingly that perhaps Nykvist was just the "better photographer".

After parting company with Bergman, Fischer's career wasn't spectacular. "A rather sad mess," was how Jacques Tati's biographer David Bellos characterised the collaboration between the DP and Tati on the latter's Swedish TV project 'Parade' (1974). Fischer also worked on Anthony Asquith's rarely revived thriller 'Two Living, One Dead' (1961), shot in Sweden.

In 1992, Bergman and the CEO of the Swedish Film Institute gave Fischer the Ingmar Bergman prize. This was an award for those whose work was overlooked by the main Swedish movie awards, the Guldbagge awards. It must have seemed like a consolation prize but, in 2002, Fischer finally won an honorary Guldbagge award of his own. ♦♦ Geoffrey Macnab



PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMUEL REBERD

wonderful Lon Chaney, is set in the world of the circus. This was MGM's first production, and the roaring, ravenous circus lion doesn't just appear in the film, but also makes its debut in MGM's famous production logo. It's a film with connections to [Bergman's own] *Sawdust and Tinsel* (*Gycklarnas afton*, 1953). Shame and humiliation, the pain of the white clown, the tension between bourgeois life and the life of the artist, the clown and the rage – it's all there in this masterful silent film, made by the director most dear to Ingmar.

Silent laughter

I will never forget how we all laughed at Buster Keaton's *The General* (1926). A train ride with open carriages – Keaton exits a tunnel, unshakeably serious, his face black with soot. The room explodes with laughter. Finally Ingmar gets to his feet, laughing until he's out of breath, exhaustedly wiping his eyes.

As a moviegoer, Ingmar was practically childish. And a professional. And excited. He didn't indulge in intellectual analysis or the reflections of a cineaste. The greatest praise that could be bestowed on a film was: "The best flick of the summer – a real Fårö film."

He saw the films made by most of his younger colleagues. I was struck by the generosity of his comments. He was often genuinely sad and hurt if you didn't like the film on offer.

I have often pondered what went on at the three o'clock cinema – what was the fascination for Ingmar, sheer film interest aside? What was it that captivated him in this way?

Back to Le Clézio: "Film is always now." Though, in fact, everything is over – the actors are somewhere else. Or, as Ingmar often exclaimed while watching an old film, "To think that everyone we see is dead!"

It felt as though, in the company of his old black-and-white films, he allowed himself to be cradled in a special room between the present and the past – a kind of in-between. Psychoanalysts talk about the 'transitional area' that has to be reached in order for growth and healing to occur; in an artistic context this is a place for playfulness and creativity. Ingmar's cinema on Fårö is like one of those magical transitional areas: a room between light and darkness, between then and now – and between the living and the dead.

■ Translated by Anders Lindahl.
This year's Bergman Week festival took place in the cinema on Fårö from 28 June to 3 July



Light and shade: the chess game in 'The Seventh Seal', shot by Gunnar Fischer, top

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SAMUEL REBERD

I particularly recall a documentary about a sawmill. The film just went on and on – footage of logs being split in perpetuity.

Some films returned every summer. These were the most loved ones: Ariane Mnouchkine's fabulous *Molière* (1978). Alain Corneau's *Tous les matins du monde* (1991), presenting moving questions about what artistry and music entail. Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950). Jacques Becker's *Casque d'or* (1952), starring Simone Signoret, a staple when it came to thoroughly romantic films.

On each birthday, 14 July, there was a Chaplin film – *The Circus* (1928) was probably the one most dear to Ingmar. Often there was a short opening film. Victor Bergdahl's animated *Kapten Grogg* cartoons, made at home on his kitchen table, were dearly loved by Ingmar. (There were also *Kapten Grogg* festivals for the grandchildren.) For me Ingmar often screened his short *Karin's Face* (*Karins ansikte*, 1983) about his mother, my beloved grandmother.

And finally, the high point of every summer: Victor Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage* (*Körkarlen*, 1921). I think its closing line served as a memento to Ingmar: "Lord, please let my soul come to maturity before it is reaped."

Another Sjöström film – his first Hollywood production – was the last film I watched in the cinema with Ingmar, at Easter in 2006. *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924), starring the

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Europe's auteurs in action

One of the odder experiences of the past half-decade has been watching directors raised in the realist traditions of British television or at home with the measured pace of novel adaptations and costume drama sinking their creative teeth into Hollywood action movies. It began with Paul Greengrass, who started off on *World in Action*, did what was expected of him with TV dramas *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* and *Bloody Sunday*, and then suddenly discovered the joys of the gas-operated car cannon in *Bourne II* and *III*. More recently there has been Joe Wright, whose last British-made film was *Atonement* but whose latest movie is the action-thriller *Hanna*.

Pondering this trend towards the bigger train set, and leaving aside such obvious predecessors as John Boorman with *Point Blank* and Peter Yates with *Bullitt* – and indeed the transatlantic career changes of such directors as Wolfgang Petersen and Paul Verhoeven – I fell to wondering how Europe's great auteurs would get on should they stray into the world of cunning stunts and spectacular car crashes. Here, in the spirit of the silly season, are a few suggestions as to what might happen.

1. Alain Resnais remakes *Thelma & Louise*. Fleeing their husbands, Sabine Azéma – who begins by defiantly lighting a cigarette to prove she is (a) free of her husband and (b) French – sets off across France in a convertible with Fanny Ardant. For much of the time, the camera frames just the two actresses, as Azéma talks without pausing for breath and Ardant begins to look increasingly irritated. Respite comes when they pick up a man in a white T-shirt and James Dean jacket. It turns out to be André Dussollier pretending to be much younger (although everyone puts on a show of not noticing so it doesn't matter). The respite is, however, short-lived and Azéma and Ardant are soon alone again. The former's endless chatter becomes so irritating that, finally, Ardant seizes the wheel and steers the car over the edge of the Gorges du Tarn. As the frame freezes on the convertible in mid-air, the words *ou bien* (or else) appear on the screen and we begin again, working through several other versions of the same story involving, in no particular order, Azéma not smoking, Ardant doing the talking and Dussollier playing his age.

2. Béla Tarr remakes *Two-Lane Blacktop*. The development process is slow given Tarr's insistence that the existing screenplay (a) has too much

I fell to wondering how Europe's great auteurs would get on should they stray into the world of cunning stunts and spectacular car crashes

dialogue, (b) spends too much time off the highway and (c) is too short. Progress is slow; producers come and go; and, as a decade or so goes by, Tarr immerses himself in 1970s American cinema, showing special interest in *Five Easy Pieces*. Shooting begins with János Derzsi in a Dodge Charger driving very slowly along an empty desert highway with the camera tracking beside him. Chapter two: Derzsi stops at a roadside diner and orders potatoes. The waitress points out that potatoes are served only as part of other dishes. Very slowly, Derzsi begins to work his way through Jack Nicholson's "hold the chicken" speech from *Five Easy Pieces* until potatoes are served – for that, it turns out, is all there is – and slowly eaten. Chapter three: Derzsi returns to the car and drives some more. It begins to snow, necessitating expensive special effects since snow is rare in Arizona. Some time later, a car passes in the other direction.

3. Rainer Werner Fassbinder makes *The Fast and the Furious*. This turns out to be a prequel: a few scenes from a lost work made just before *Querelle*, shot in the same lurid style as that film. During driving sequences, a camera is installed at pedal level so that Vin Diesel's crotch is in the foreground of all shots. No other scenes were apparently completed and rumour has it that the studio rejected the footage on the grounds that mainstream US taste would take another 15 years to come round. Sadly, the film remains a fragment.

4. Nanni Moretti remakes *The Getaway*. Having been declared

persona non grata at the Venice Film Festival, a Scandinavian director (played by Moretti in a blonde wig) flees across the Slovenian border on a Vespa. The only voice heard during the movie is that of Moretti in a philosophical monologue. One critic counts 987 sentences beginning with the word *io*. Silvio Berlusconi recommends the movie, saying that all those who don't like his presentation of Italy should be given a free Vespa on which to leave. Moretti discovers he is not all that well known in Slovenia, and returns to Italy.

5. Jean-Luc Godard remakes *Gone in 60 Seconds*. The concept of property as theft and the idea of a car as penis substitute become the guiding principles of the story, and linear narrative is scrupulously avoided. Additionally, in formal terms, the need to subvert the nature of the action movie results in the use of repeated quotations from Kropotkin, Reich, Althusser, Debray and the Ford Mustang owner's manual filling the screen. Since Godard decides there will be no post-production on the film, these quotations have to be shone direct on to the car windshields using a complex system of projectors. This blinds the stuntmen and, after several unintentional crashes, shooting is abandoned. Godard claims that action movies are dead anyway. "*L'action est un acte réactionnaire*," he declares.

6. Sir Kenneth Branagh remakes a Marvel superhero movie. No, wait a minute, that'd be silly.

♦♦ Nick Roddick



● **Film4 Summer Screen** returns for another summer of open-air screenings. The season includes the UK premiere of Pedro Almodóvar's *'The Skin I Live In'*, *'Chinatown'*, a New York double bill of *'Serpico'* and *'Shaft'*, and ends with *'The Princess Bride'*. Somerset House, London, 27 July to 7 August.

● **Screenfields**, Manchester's outdoor cinema, also has a programme of films for the summer. Titles include *'A Fish Called Wanda'*, *'21 Grams'* and *'Grey Gardens'*. Screenfields, Manchester, until 1 September.

● **The Performing Arts on Film & Television Catalogue** is a recently published reference guide to the film and video holdings relating to the performing arts in the archives of the BFI, Arts Council England, Lux and Central St Martins. Areas covered include Music Hall, Dance, Theatre, Music and Performance Art. The catalogue can be found at www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/publications/performing-arts (where a pdf version is also available to download).

● **Shubbak**, a festival celebrating contemporary culture from across the Arab world, features a film programme including such titles as *'The Kingdom of Women'*, *'Transit Cities'*, *'Salata Baladi'* and *'This Is My Picture When I Was Dead'*. The Mosaic Rooms, A.M. Qattan Foundation, London SW5, 19-23 July. www.mosaicrooms.org

● **French Cancan** (below), Jean Renoir's exuberant, colourful 1955 musical set in 1890s Montmartre, is rereleased in a restored print by the BFI on 5 August, at BFI Southbank and cinemas nationwide. A complementary season, *'Celebrating Toulouse-Lautrec & French Can Can'*, runs at Ciné Lumière, Institut Français, London SW7, from 2-15 July.



● **Vintage Festival** is a weekend of films celebrating the British rogue, presented by fashion designer Wayne Hemingway and film producer Stephen Woolley. The rogues in question include Terry-Thomas in *'The Naked Truth'*, Oliver Reed in *'The Party's Over'* and Dennis Price in *'Kind Hearts and Coronets'*. BFI Southbank, London, 29-31 July.





ALL SHE DESIRES

With Todd Haynes's five-part miniseries of James M. Cain's novel 'Mildred Pierce'—already the inspiration for a famous 1945 film—HBO has produced a work of truly cinematic ambition, says **Paul Julian Smith**. Overleaf, Haynes talks to **Isabel Stevens**

Whatever happened to HBO? Once the pioneer of quality serials, since the end of *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* the US premium channel has seen the mantle of long-form television fiction pass to such basic cable stations as AMC (*Mad Men*). And if HBO still leads at the Emmys in sheer numbers of awards, those accolades are now for special event programming: TV movies and miniseries. Perhaps, then, it's time to reread the channel's old tag line: if "it's not TV, it's HBO", then maybe this is because HBO now simply means cinema.

Exhibit A is Todd Haynes's masterful five-part adaptation of *Mildred Pierce*. Described simply as "a film by Todd Haynes", and starring a spectacular Kate Winslet in what she claims is her most demanding role since *Titanic* (1997), it first aired in the US from 27 March to 10 April, before receiving a single theatrical screening in New York, appropriately enough on Mother's Day. As its star insists, this miniseries has "nothing mini about it". The experience was, Winslet says, like shooting three features in 17 weeks. And this extended "film" (at 80 minutes, the last episode alone approaches feature length) offers all the quality and craft the hardest-core cinephile could ask for. Thus *Mildred Pierce* comes branded not just with the HBO seal of approval, but with the auteurist distinction of its director; and Mildred, a working woman of Depression-era Los Angeles (capable but vulnerable), serves as a troubled sister to Haynes's

earlier long-suffering suburbanites in films such as *Safe* (1995) and *Far from Heaven* (2002).

With his training in feminist film theory, Haynes is one of the few filmmakers to use words like 'temporality' and 'mediation' in press materials. And it is thus no surprise that he re-reads the central drama between loving (too loving) mother and wayward daughter as a psychic conflict between Mildred's desire for merger with her child and Veda's struggle, equal and opposite, for separation. Reassuringly rigorous in its approach to potentially melodramatic material, Haynes's film is also exquisitely, yet modestly, crafted. Costume designer Ann Roth insisted that the characters' wardrobe should look always slightly out of date. So the initially impoverished Mildred wears the same flowery print dress for the first three hours of running time. Through movie magic, midtown Manhattan stands in convincingly for downtown LA, and New York State for the California coastline. A rare mini-colony of Spanish-style houses on Long Island substitutes for infra dig Glendale, loathed by the socially climbing Veda.

Yet meticulously crafted *mise en scène* never reads like period prettiness. Haynes shoots Winslet consistently through house and car windows (one of those 'mediations' he's so keen on), their glass streaked and spotted with rain and grime. And, in hypnotic lateral tracking shots, he watches as she moves in and out of those perfectly dressed locations, which serve quite simply to reproduce the texture of everyday life in an era not so far from our own. There is an oblique historical reference here ➤

WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE
In the role immortalised by Joan Crawford in 1945, Kate Winslet, both pics, plays Mildred Pierce, a woman driven by love for her daughter Veda (Morgan Turner, left in top pic)

Todd Haynes Mildred Pierce



too (an unspoken clash of 'temporalities'). Set in the 1930s, like James M. Cain's 1941 source novel, and avoiding the *noir* look of Michael Curtiz's 1945 adaptation (a classic vehicle for Joan Crawford), Haynes's fluid shooting style looks back to the 1970s: the last period – or so he believes – of a progressive and innovative cinema in the US. And in a final temporal level, *Mildred Pierce's* references to unemployment, housing bubbles and predatory bankers come all too close to home in America today.

This auteurist distinction is backed up by literary prestige. Haynes (who takes a co-writing credit with Jon Raymond, Kelly Reichardt's regular screenwriter) sticks as close as the most clinging mother to Cain's novel, which proves to be a revelation. Lacking the murder mystery that framed Curtiz's version, the book reads more like social realism than hard-boiled crime. Like Cain, Haynes dotes on the minutiae of the restaurant business, with its intricate café choreography and waitresses drilled with military precision. The second episode begins with the surreal sight of Mildred carrying stone-filled dishes around her bedroom in preparation for the rigours of her new job in a diner. And when she opens her own first restaurant it will be stripped down, like Depression America and much of Haynes's film, to the Fordist bare bones: an all-chicken menu dispensing with such fripperies as customer choice. While the credits of Curtiz's movie show the titles swept away by the Pacific waves to a thundering score by Max Steiner, the more modest Haynes favours a faded fan-like Deco design, set to composer Carter Burwell's muted flute and piano motif.

Minutely documenting the horrors of working life for women in the 1930s, the novel nonetheless parachutes in two moments of high melodrama that seem to come straight from the 19th-century novel of adultery. Both are faithfully (tearfully) reproduced in the miniseries. Taking an uncharacteristic break from self-sacrificing labour, Mildred has casual sex by the sea with aristocratic Monty (played here by Guy Pearce), only to return home to find her younger child stricken with illness. In this pre-antibiotic era, a pimple will prove fatal. Much later, when she drives her car to break up with Monty at his crumbling mansion, she makes her way through a storm of Biblical proportions, the most transparent of pathetic fallacies.

It's as if the shallow soil of California society might be swept away by such sudden rain. Cain takes care to mention the fake Spanish coats of

arms on shoddy tract-house walls, clearly visible in the miniseries' sets. Likewise the hospitality business is a parody of authentic domesticity. Mildred's first restaurant (the one with the chicken) was originally built as a 'model home' by her husband, testimony to a brief and fragile wealth founded on property speculation.

Yet if this society is fake, its poverty is all too real. When Barbara Stanwyck is in the supermarket in *Double Indemnity* (1944, also based, of course, on a Cain novel), she is a splendid femme fatale, with white-blonde mane and fathomless dark glasses. When Mildred goes shopping, the still gorgeous Winslet becomes a frumpish hausfrau, solemnly calculating whether she can afford that extra Wiener for her children's breakfast.

So, in spite of momentary extravagances (the child's tragic death, the outsized storm), Cain and Haynes are both brutally prosaic about money and sex. Mildred's men are all duds. First husband Bert (Brián F. O'Byrne), pasty and balding, has lost his real-estate business before the action even begins. Treacherous lawyer Wally (James LeGros) seems stuck at the exact point where lethargy meets gluttony and lust (Mildred trades a home-cooked meal for desultory sex). Penniless loafer Monty, however, is a fabulous lover, inspiring, Cain writes, a "hot, wanton excitement that seemed somewhat shameful". But Mildred's true passion remains her daughter. In the novel Veda gives her mother "chills", "tingles", even "ecstasy". Whether tenderly sharing a bed or furiously beating her on the bottom, Winslet convincingly conveys a love without limits or self-knowledge, a love that Cain compares to "cancer".

Faithful once more to his source, Haynes contrives finales for each episode that focus on a fatal passion that is "less like a mother than a lover" (Cain, once more). Thus the first instalment ends with the camera wandering over to a window where we discover that young Veda (a splendidly sullen Morgan Turner), seen from behind and framed by ornamental ironwork, has overheard her mother's secret shame at taking the waitress

Haynes sticks as close as the most clinging mother to Cain's novel, which proves to be a revelation

job. More dramatically but no less unnervingly, in the last scene of episode two, after the death of her younger child, Mildred spoons so close on the bed with Veda that, red hair spilling over their faces, they can hardly be told apart. This is merger with a vengeance.

Such tropes of maternal melodrama would be readily recognisable to Joan Crawford or Barbara Stanwyck, even if their erotic origin can only now stand fully revealed. But Haynes never reduces these clichés to camp. Everyday indignities (the red, raw feet of a woman tramping the streets in kitten-heeled shoes) leave no space for irony, even when framed by Haynes's multiple 'mediations'. Which is not to say that Haynes will, finally, deny us some fabulous moments of movie glamour. When the adult Veda (an icily slutty Evan Rachel Wood), who has previously shown talent only for blackmail and backstabbing, is suddenly transformed into a coloratura soprano, Mildred attends her first big recital. Forsaking for once Depression make do and mend, Haynes treats us here to glorious backdrops and costumes, including the newly wealthy Mildred's golden gown, woven with threads of real metal (Veda tends to favour the expensive two-tone fabric known appropriately enough as 'sharkskin'). But Haynes's feminist film theory makes its own appearance here too. As is well known, it is through music and *mise en scène* that melodrama lends an outlet to those deeply repressed feelings that can never be spoken aloud. It could thus not be more appropriate that Mildred should thrill and quiver to the sublime sound of a voice whose owner inspires in her a love that dare not speak its name.

Female subjectivity

Given such evidence of quality and craft, surely *Mildred Pierce*, funded by an indulgent HBO and midwifed by Haynes's long-time producer-collaborator Christine Vachon, is the purest of cinema, albeit shown on a small screen? Yet there is much here that makes for a specifically televisual narrative. This miniseries is airing in a year when only one big American summer movie is female-focused: the uproarious comedy *Bridesmaids*. It is impossible to imagine in contemporary American cinema such an extended and sympathetic exploration of female subjectivity as the one Haynes delights us with here.

Television provides a haven for distinguished women actors, especially those like Winslet on the cusp of middle age or beyond. Julianna Margulies,

A GIRL'S GOTTA DO
Surrounded by useless
men – left to right, Bert
(Brian F. O'Byrne), Wally
(James LeGros) and
Monty (Guy Pearce) –
Mildred must make her
own way

star of the Peabody Award-winning network drama *The Good Wife*, has gone so far as to call television “a woman’s medium”. If Joan or Barbara were alive today, they would no doubt – like Glenn Close (*Damages*) or Holly Hunter (*Saving Grace*) – be heading up a cable TV series.

The leisurely rhythm of Haynes’s narration, which lingers over apparently insignificant details (restaurant minutiae, real-estate rules), might well be traced back to the Slow Cinema movement. But it refers just as much to a distinctly televisual temporality (that word again) in which high drama is embedded in the slower domestic routines of everyday life. Eternally cooking, at home and at work, Mildred keeps the calendar for her thankless family and her feckless, jobless men. Just so the relentless rhythms of television (night by night, season by season) beat out the bounds of time for the audience watching at home. And while movies, as glamorous and seductive as Mildred’s golden gown, invite us to dream, TV drama, more familiar and everyday, sometimes asks us simply to think. Haynes’s camera often just holds on Winslet’s luminous face as she struggles (we struggle) to work through some new, unthinkable betrayal by daughter or lover. Even the effortless stardom of Veda – launched by a single performance on the radio show sponsored, we are told, by “Snack-o-Ham” – anticipates television culture. Seen today, Veda’s career, as fake as that of any ‘reality’ star, proves just one point: that ‘America’s got talent’.

The last scene of Curtiz’s film has Crawford step out from the police station, where she has spent the night telling her life story, into a new dawn, lit by a luminous California sun. The final moral of the novel and miniseries proves less hopeful. Indeed it would appear to be a most un-American lesson: that stasis is best. Having been stripped of her business by her so-called friends and seen her daughter sold to the highest bidder (as spokeswoman for “Consolidated Foods”), Mildred is right back where she started: in the mock Spanish house with its fake coat of arms and her dullard of a first husband, with his no-job and growing bald spot. Father and mother make a final toast to their New York-bound bad seed: “To hell with her!”

In similar style we might well ask: “Who cares if *Mildred Pierce* is cinema or television?” Haynes, Winslet and HBO have taken the audience on a conceptually convincing and emotionally draining journey. No cinephile or TV fan could hope for more.

ALL THAT THE MINISERIES ALLOWS

Todd Haynes tells **Isabel Stevens** how HBO’s ‘*Mildred Pierce*’ gave him space to explore female experience in a way today’s Hollywood would never permit



Isabel Stevens: How did you originally come across ‘*Mildred Pierce*’, via James M. Cain’s novel (1941) or the Michael Curtiz/Joan Crawford film (1945)?

Todd Haynes: I had seen the film many times, starting at Brown University in the context of feminist film courses. I remember discussions around the hybrid *film noir* and maternal melodrama styles in the original Michael Curtiz film. There’s even an article that sticks in my head by Pam Cook, called ‘Duplicity in *Mildred Pierce*’, that examines the film along those lines.

It wasn’t a classic melodrama that necessarily got under my skin in the way that Douglas Sirk’s and Max Ophüls’s films certainly have. That’s because the *noir* framing element sets up an investigation narrative that makes the question hanging over the film: “Who’s good and who’s bad, Mildred or [her daughter] Veda?” It reduces the complexity of the mother/daughter relationship to those binary terms, which I find recurrent in *noir* but actually more complex in melodrama or domestic drama. I loved it when I read James M. Cain’s novel and found so many divergent points from the film adaptation.

IS: In ‘*Mildred Pierce*’ Cain’s female characters are rather more complex than they are in his famous crime novels, such as ‘*The Postman Always Rings Twice*’ and ‘*Double Indemnity*’, where the women are generally much more stereotyped.

MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

Todd Haynes, left, had already discussed the role of Mildred Pierce with Kate Winslet, right, before approaching HBO with the five-part project

TH: Yeah, exactly, they’re vixens, directly out of this *noir* vernacular. In *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, there’s a first-person narrator, voice and character that carry you through these stories. With *Mildred Pierce*, Cain decided to do a third-person, more objective and more realistic story of a mother and daughter during the Depression years. Coupled with that was Cain’s intense love of classical music and his own history of being a failed opera singer. In many ways one of his goals in writing the book was to try to describe the hothouse domestic environment that creates this rare breed of musical talent.

I had explored the domestic drama and maternal melodramas of the 1940s and 50s in *Far from Heaven* [2002], but that film was about more traditional female characters who are passive, separated from the workplace and trapped in homes. In *Mildred Pierce* you have something very different: a woman who has the values and self-regard in the home that you would expect, but who is also transforming the workplace.

IS: When did you start to think about ‘*Mildred Pierce*’ in terms of an adaptation for television?

TH: My producer Christine Vachon had started to hunt around the world of cable and network television for financing options, and said that I should think about working in the serial format. They're taking risks in cable that are harder and harder for independent film. And I enjoy that longer-term relationship that you have over time with the material in television. That's most true in the great series for which HBO is famous, like *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*.

Jon Raymond [Haynes's co-writer on *Mildred Pierce*] had been telling me to read Cain's novel. And he had never seen the film, so we came at it from two different sides. When I was reading it in the summer of 2008, Bear Stearns had collapsed and everything on the financial horizon was trembling, and I'm reading this novel about the Depression and a woman thrust into being a single mother, trying to find a job and work out how she will make ends meet and maintain her middle-class life. It was so full of themes that I didn't remember from the film – it turns out they weren't in there.

It was so important that the book spanned nine years, carrying you through that decade. Television also offered a different audience than I had addressed before. The kind of films I make appeal to a more film-savvy audience. This was going out in people's living-rooms during this specific time in our cultural history. But the material made sense of that to me. It also made me think of ways of telling the story – feeling like the novel had a really great unsentimental, almost materialist approach that would be wonderful to evoke cinematically.

IS: What kind of research did you do?

TH: It was a matter of jumping into the Depression years – a period I've always been keen to learn more about. I was very interested in how Los Angeles in the 1920s became this extraordinary city that exploded with a housing boom. It's remarkable how much middle-class expectations, values and desires were so firmly established in that decade. And then, when the Depression hit, how much this crisis became one of middle-class identity, of preserving and maintaining who you were – arguably more so in this city than anywhere else. Also LA had a uniquely robust classical-music culture. The building of the Hollywood Bowl [in 1922] generated a great deal of interest in classical music, and many radio stations were established, most of which seemed to be based in LA and offered classical-music programmes.

For the period design I worked with Mark Friedberg, who I'd collaborated with on *Far from Heaven*. There's a real care for detail that you feel in the film. Mark and I went to Glendale and Pasadena and downtown LA. We had historical documenta-



BLACK AND WHITE

Michael Curtiz's noir-ish 'Mildred Pierce', with Joan Crawford, right, as Mildred and Ann Blyth as Veda; below right, Evan Rachel Wood as Haynes's Veda

tion of the period and found that there really was no 1930s LA still intact. So we worked out that we would have to create it. There were tax incentives to keep [the production] in New York. We knew we could find somewhere on Long Island to evoke the Pacific Coast, but that Spanish architecture of Glendale was missing. We scoured the East Coast and finally found these neighbourhoods with Spanish architecture in Queens.

IS: At what stage did HBO become involved?

TH: We brought the project to HBO in the summer of 2009 – I had drafts of all five episodes and had had initial conversations with Kate [Winslet] about the role. HBO were very interested, but their budget for 2010 was basically committed. Eventually they squeezed us in because there were limitations on Kate's schedule. They were fantastic and accommodating, but could only afford so much.

IS: When it came to the actual production, how did you approach filming? Do you storyboard?

TH: I usually storyboard – I like to prepare meticulously for everything. And I did as much of that as I possibly could. But the real shock of this experience was the sheer volume of material we needed to shoot per day. I had a fantastic crew – there were really no weak links and I don't think I've been able to say that conclusively before this. But we all came from film. No one had really ever worked with television production schedules. They like

you to shoot five pages a day. I told [DP] Ed Lachman I'd come with as many specific visual plans and shot lists as I could, but there would be an element of doing it on our feet as there's no other way of doing it that quickly. The places where I felt the most specific planning produced the best results were the exterior scenes that establish downtown Los Angeles, and Mildred's attempts to go out into the world job-hunting.

There were also places where I needed to see how the scene unfolded dramatically. I had ideas of how I wanted Kate and Guy [Pearce, who plays Monty, the lover who becomes her second husband] to be in the big final scene in episode three in the servants' quarters, which was a set. It's a complicated scene with a lot of changes emotionally, dramatically and rhythmically, and we wanted to use that space thoroughly and keep it visually engaging. I couldn't come up with a strict visual plan until I saw what the blocking was ultimately going to be. So in that case it evolved organically out of what we did with the actors.

Kate was a continual source of ideas – not just in terms of who this character is, but of how we're telling her story. She is in every scene. There isn't anything that we witness that she doesn't – the story is totally told through her eyes.

IS: The performances are much more understated in your version than in Curtiz's film.

TH: Yes, I really wanted them to feel like characters you could relate to today. One thing that was revelatory about the book was its description of Mildred's sexual life. It was quite frank in ways that

couldn't have been shown in the 1945 film. We forget there was a complex sexual life for women before the 1960s. This story also gives you the chance to explore Mildred's relationships with other women and the really interesting relationships with men in this weirdly emasculated workforce. Cain seems to suggest a crisis of masculinity in this strange, inverted world where women are taking the lead on the job front and men seem to be waylaid and still coming to after the Depression.

IS: The young Veda in particular must have been a complex role for the girl who plays her, Morgan Turner.

TH: That was such a hard performance. I wanted a kid who had a real reality and a sense that she wasn't fully formed yet, that she was trying out these roles and these values – but someone that had vulnerability and insecurities as well. It would have been too much to see Veda fully formed at the beginning. That's what I liked about spanning this nine-year narrative, compared to the original film, which covers just a few years.

IS: Your dialogue is very faithful to Cain's, which manages to be ordinary and poetic at the same time.

TH: Cain began his career writing short comedic dialogue pieces for newspapers. He moved from the Midwest to the West Coast, where he could hear regional differences. Los Angeles was a melting-pot of people and had a wealth of character types that he brought into his writing. In *Mildred Pierce* he has terrific fun with dialect, particularly with Veda's music instructor Treviso – he writes his Italian dialect phonetically. But it's true for every single character, even those you might lump in the same socio-economic class – they each have a very unique and specific way of speech. It meant that the actors could bring serious attention to detail – even those, like Kate or Guy, who aren't American. A very specific pronunciation of a couple of words can evoke an entire generation, a place in time, a socio-economic class.

IS: One of the most powerful scenes is the one at the end of episode four where Mildred suddenly hears Veda singing on the radio.

TH: It's one of my favourite scenes as well. The movie functions like an unrequited love story, where Mildred's relationship with Veda is always full of

It's like an unrequited love story, where Mildred's relationship with Veda is full of unfulfilled desire

her unfulfilled desire to connect to this girl – to find an easy closeness that Veda never allows. There are moments where music and distance unite to make real emotional peaks and pivotal narrative moments. It happens in two places: in the final episode, when Mildred is at the opera and puts on the opera glasses to get a better view of Veda singing; but the first time is when she rediscovers this daughter and her unknown singing ability on the radio. We chose that exquisite aria from Delibes's *Lakmé*, which was recommended to me by my music advisor as being appropriate for Veda's [coloratura] voice. That becomes a transcendent moment due to the distances involved, but also due to the music conveying emotions.

IS: There's a gradual progression throughout the serial from light to dark. The final episode is almost entirely shot in shadows and dark interiors.

TH: The sense of encroaching doom increases as we progress, especially as we spend more time in Monty's gloomy old mansion. Early on I thought it would be great to be able to film in those domestic spaces, which have such a great sense of contrast. LA has all this sunshine, but those Spanish houses were surprisingly dark. You feel this in films like *Chinatown* – those interiors are pitch-black inside.

IS: The way you've filmed 'Mildred Pierce', there's a lot of framing – lots of looking through windows, mirrors and reflections – which feels both claustrophobic and voyeuristic. How did you arrive at that visual style?

TH: I was thinking that this was for a TV audience, and I'm taking a classic piece of Americana and a classic crime-novel writer and presenting them today because it's relevant. It made me think about the revisionist genre films I watched in the 1970s. So many of the great movies that we love from that period are new takes on old genres, like the gangster film with *The Godfather*, the detective genre with *Chinatown*, or even the horror

genre with *The Exorcist*. At the writing stage I looked back on those movies to see how much they shattered the original genres to give them that sense of modernity and relevance. What I found was that they *didn't* at all – they were very true to those generic conditions.

But the visual language normally associated with *noir* is where they took a different tack. They had a more relaxed, slightly cooler observational approach. And I love that. Just watching the movies that Gordon Willis shot [eg *Klute*, *The Godfather*, *The Parallax View*] is a complete seminar – a concerted, sophisticated remove from the dramatic material that gives an audience the sense that they are being trusted to find their own connections to what they're watching. Today's almost hysterical, show-you-everything, keep-the-camera-moving, handheld, cutting-every-second style deprives the viewer of our trust in them.

That was our initial approach visually: frames within frames, window views, shots through doorways and houses. There's a specific use of the zoom, a scopophilic extension – it always underscores the act of looking – which is part of the domestic domain. In homes there's always the sense that you're being looked at by someone – you never know who's looking at who.

When we were trying to squeeze the script down to the budget constraints, we came across a book about Saul Leiter, a mid-century American photographer known mostly for his colour work. He loved shooting through windows, precipitation on glass, delimited views through café windows in New York City. [His approach] conveyed more of a sense of time and place than if you could see the entire block. It was also a way of minimising costs, because we couldn't afford to show the whole block – but it gave you a more potent sense of what it felt like to be there.

IS: Were there any films you were influenced by when shooting 'Mildred Pierce'?

TH: It really was those films from the 70s – films like *Klute* and *The Parallax View*. Gordon Willis's cinematography in those films made me feel secure with a restrained camera. I was also really interested in how zooms could function narratively, and you do see that throughout that period. So many of Altman's films use the zoom in a searching way through long-lens shots, from *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* through to *Nashville*. There's a real security and conviction in holding back and allowing the action, the performances and the subject-matter to lead you.

■ 'Mildred Pierce' is broadcast weekly on Sky Atlantic until 23 July, and will be released on DVD in six months' time



Reader offers

COMPETITIONS

THE KINGDOM: Lars von Trier's television series on DVD to be won

Lars von Trier's critically acclaimed TV series *The Kingdom* gained cult status when it first aired more than 15 years ago. It's set within the walls of a Danish hospital where otherworldly events unfold, including a young girl who haunts the lift and a phantom ambulance appearing each evening. Eccentric

behaviour by the staff and a pregnancy that takes a bizarre turn are just some of the other strange goings-on. The full two series are brought together by Second Sight in a four-disc box-set that also features behind-the-scenes footage, television advertisements shot by von Trier and featurettes.

We have three copies to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Who was von Trier's co-director on 'The Kingdom'?

- a. Susanne Bier
- b. Thomas Vinterberg
- c. Morten Arnfred



WIN

CINEMA DIRECTORY: Volumes on American Hollywood and Italy to be won

The *Directory of World Cinema* series from Intellect Books provides a rich insight into a national or regional cinema via a collection of essays and reviews from leading academics on the directors, films and genres that are most significant to the territory's cinematic history. The latest in the series are *American Hollywood* and *Italy*. The former includes chapters on crime film, blockbusters, comedy and westerns. The latter offers a comprehensive sweep of Italian cinema over the decades – from silent spectacle to the *giallo*, from the spaghetti western to the neorealist works of Rossellini. We have five pairs of volumes to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning both, please answer the following question:

Q. Who played Lex Luthor in the 1970s/80s 'Superman' film franchise?

- a. Kevin Spacey
- b. Gene Hackman
- c. Karl Malden



WIN

SUBMARINE: Film and book to be won

Richard Ayoade's *Submarine* is a tale of adolescence in Swansea following the twofold mission of teenager Oliver Tate, who plans to bring his parents back together from the brink of separation and lose his virginity to new girlfriend Jordana before his 16th birthday. Released on DVD and Blu-ray, this observant comedy and accomplished debut feature is adapted from the original novel by Joe Dunthorne. Courtesy of Optimum Releasing and publisher Penguin we have five pairs of the DVD and book to be won.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state on your entry if you would prefer the DVD or Blu-ray edition of the film:

Q. In which television series did Richard Ayoade play the character Moss?

- a. The Mighty Boosh
- b. The IT Crowd
- c. Spaced



WIN

RAOUL WALSH: Five biographies to be won

After entering the movie business as an actor, followed by a stint as an assistant to D.W. Griffith, Raoul Walsh (1887-1980) soon emerged as a significant filmmaker in his own right, contributing to Hollywood's golden age and directing such heavyweights as Humphrey Bogart, Errol Flynn and Marlene Dietrich.

In this full-length biography (published by University Press of Kentucky), Marilyn Ann Moss recounts Walsh's illustrious life and achievements in a career that spanned more than half a century. We have five copies of *Raoul Walsh: The True Adventures of Hollywood's Legendary Director* to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which one of these Errol Flynn films was NOT directed by Raoul Walsh?

- a. They Died with Their Boots On
- b. The Dark Avenger
- c. Gentleman Jim



WIN

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Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'The Kingdom box-set', 'Submarine DVD and book', 'American Hollywood and Italy directories' or 'Raoul Walsh book' in the subject heading, to: s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk.

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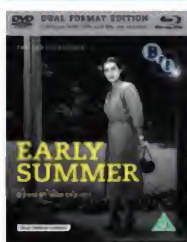
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More than any other film, Alain Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* lays itself open to esoteric interpretations. Here, 50 years after its release, **Brian Dillon** maps the film's relationship to sculpture, while overleaf **Keith Reader** decodes a sado-masochistic subtext

SCULPTING IN TIME

I am now quite prepared to claim that *Marienbad* is the greatest film ever made, and to pity those who cannot see it." So wrote Jacques Brunius in *Sight & Sound* in 1962, regarding "the film I had been waiting for during the last thirty years". Five decades on from its first release a year earlier, Alain Resnais's stylish conundrum still seems conjured out of some *sui generis* cinematic future. (Which is not to deny its influence on – to name two blatant instances – Stanley Kubrick and Peter Greenaway, not to mention Karl Lagerfeld, whose spring 2011 collection for Chanel played grandiloquently with the costumes and set design of the film.) What Resnais and scriptwriter Alain Robbe-Grillet achieved in *Last Year in Marienbad* was not just the much bruited importation of the narrative techniques of the *nouveau roman* into film – Resnais had already made *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and Robbe-Grillet's texts were anyway indebted to what he called cinema's perpetual 'present tense' – but nothing less than the transmuting of film into a type of sculpture. *Marienbad* is cinema's greatest hymn to stasis.

It was perhaps the mysterious immobility of the film, allied with Sacha Vierny's gliding cinematography in 2.35:1 Dyaliscope, that transfixed and bemused audiences in 1961. (Vierny later commented: "While the [Dyaliscope] format usually implies a certain immobility, something extremely static, Resnais had a field day with camera movements, low-angle tracking shots.") But at least on the surface, it was the riddle of the film's story and structure that intrigued. A man (X, played by Giorgio Albertazzi) tries to lure a woman (A, Delphine Seyrig) from her presumed husband (M, Sacha Pitoëff) with the tale of a prior meeting and promise a year earlier. She resists, and the repetitive and labyrinthine pattern of their cross-purposed encounter is played out, with infinite



BY STILL POSTERS AND DESIGN (4)



TABLEAUX VIVANTS
Against the backdrop of a palatial hotel, X (Giorgio Albertazzi, on right in main pic) tries to lure A (Delphine Seyrig, on left) from the man who may be her husband (M, Sacha Pitoëff, far left pic)

slowness, in the ballroom, bar, garden and bedrooms of a vast, luxurious hotel. The critic Roger Ebert recalls emerging from a screening of the film in Illinois and engaging in earnest discussion as to the meaning of this elaborate game. What had actually happened (if anything) in *Marienbad*? Was the film a dream, a fantasy or a *mise en abyme* about the construction of memories?

On the face of it, then, *Last Year in Marienbad* is 'about' time, storytelling and the lures of memory, in the manner of other great modernist works of the last century. But just as Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, one of the film's obvious analogues in terms of prismatic recall, turns out to be more concerned with bodies, space and things than the subjective machinery of memory, so it's worth asking how Resnais embodied the flummoxing narrative matrix imagined in Robbe-Grillet's script. The answer, as even a confused or resistant viewer must admit, lies in the film's ravishing way with gestures and attitudes, all the "prodigious tableaux" (as Michel Leiris put it in a letter to Resnais) in which bodies and inanimate objects – they are often the same thing – are discovered. The central ménage is just the pretext for an essay on cinematic movement and immobility.

In his introduction to the published version of the script, Robbe-Grillet remarked that he and Resnais saw the film entire from the outset, as if in architectural plan. A certain frozen quality was already part of that vision; in Resnais's ideas, the novelist writes, "I recognized my own efforts toward a somewhat ritual deliberation, a sense of the theatrical, even that occasional rigidity of attitude, that hieratic quality in gesture, word and setting which suggests a statue and an opera."

Almost everything in the closed world of *Last Year in Marienbad* (apart, that is, from Vierny's elegantly vagrant camera) is frozen solid into sculptural poses and gestures. The hotel itself,

confected on a set in Paris and in the opulent precincts of chateaux at Nymphenburg, Schleissheim and Amalienburg, is filled with fluid but moribund marble and stucco, gilded ceilings and mouldings, statues and motionless servants. The characters themselves are frequently frozen into attitudes of boredom, impassivity or languor. Even desire and shock (as in the bleached-out sequence that suggests X may have raped A, see sidebar p.28) are signalled in statuesque poses, and when they move at all the principals wander among guests dispersed around cavernous rooms like so much dusty furniture.

More than this, A (played by Seyrig with a delicate and faintly comical mix of froideur and vulnerability) seems at every moment ready to meld with the stone, wood or glass around her. Here she is ascending a huge staircase, her body tensing along the stone banister until she is almost a part of it; or shrinking from the calmly insistent X to fling her arms around a marble column; and again, in a scene that Seyrig later claimed was improvised on the spot, becoming one with the mirrored panels of a wardrobe. Seyrig's insistence that "certain gestures, which seem highly studied, were simply the result of my awkwardness" is beside the point in a film where human bodies are reduced (or promoted) to the status of metaphysical mannequins. And this is before one has considered the profusion of statues and smaller sculptures that punctuate Vierny's tracking shots through corridors and garden – including the slyly insinuated cardboard cut-out of Hitchcock that lurks in the shadows ten minutes into the film.

Embodiment of hesitation

If the timescale of *Last Year in Marienbad* is endlessly fluid and vexing – scenes from the present and (possibly notional) past are constantly imbricated in each other – the film nonetheless ➡

◀ encircles a solid emblem of the encounter between X and A. In the hotel's intricate and sterile garden, a large sculpture depicts a man and woman in classical dress, he advancing and she holding back. It's the couple's gestures that fascinate X and A: is the man's hand extended to hold her back, and hers to point towards something we cannot see? (In numerous shots, the hotel guests – and the central trio – also gaze out of frame at who knows what.) Sculpture here is an embodiment of hesitation, of a movement stalled and uncertain. It transpires that the frozen universe the film describes is really no such thing: the static bodies, real as well as artificial, are poised at the threshold of decision or action. Statues represent quivering potential, not a withdrawal into stasis.

At one point, in voiceover, X speaks (apparently to A) of a corridor "through which I was advancing to meet you between two rows of immobile faces". The brightly lit scene rhymes with another darker one: 15 years earlier, in Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la bête*, a passageway flanked by fragments of statuary, which turn into living candelabra, had introduced one of that film's motifs and themes – a petrified life suddenly animated by the desire and fear of another. We might even say that the sculptural obsession of *Marienbad* (in his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* Jean-Luc Godard speaks of Resnais as a filmmaker who "makes sculpture") is part of a pattern or frieze in mid-century French film. *La Jetée* (1962) is the obvious comparison: Resnais's occasional collaborator Chris Marker populated his mostly static film with numerous statues and portions of statues. Both *La Jetée* and *Marienbad* are in part films about ruins: the material remnants of vanished civilisations (in Marker's case it's Paris that is ruined; in Resnais's a whole refined culture that appears spectral and distant) and the traces of memories or fantasised futures.

The frozen universe the film describes is really no such thing. Statues represent quivering potential

In sum, after 50 years *Last Year in Marienbad* remains no less suggestive and strange in its eerie approach to the condition of sculpture. In his essay 'Notes on Gesture', the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has written that one of the functions of cinema in the 20th century was to rescue the realm of significant gesture that had been destroyed with the advent of technologies of speed and a slackening of ideas of public comportment. If that's true, then for the most part film achieved this through action, in the meaningful arcs traced by bodies on screen, whether comical or tragic. But in *Marienbad* everything stalls, and the history of human gesture returns, this time as shadows and ghosts among the statues.

■ 'Last Year in Marienbad' is rereleased in a new print on 8 July, and plays until the end of the month as part of an Alain Resnais retrospective at BFI Southbank, London

MASOCHISTICALLY YOURS

The glacial surface elegance of 'Last Year in Marienbad' can't conceal an S&M undercurrent, says **Keith Reader**



BFI STILL: POSTERS AND DESKANS (3)

Last Year in Marienbad is, I would contend, a sado-masochistic text – a description that may at first seem bizarre, applicable rather to such films as Buñuel's *Belle de jour* (1967) or Harry Kümel's *Daughters of Darkness* (1970) that have explicit sexual components absent from Resnais's work. Yet Kümel's casting of Delphine Seyrig, forever associated with her performance in *Marienbad*, was surely a homage to the earlier film, and perhaps an acknowledgement that it too is infused with sadistic and masochistic elements. These do not necessarily involve the infliction of bodily pain – *Marienbad* is a thoroughly non-corporeal film, as far removed from today's 'extreme cinema' as it would be possible to imagine – but relate rather to the battle for dominance between two different kinds of power.

Long before he became the mainstay of film-theory courses worldwide, Gilles Deleuze in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* had analysed sadism and masochism as radically different symbolic universes, the masochistic one characterised by statues, stone women and "a suprasensual emotionality, surrounded with ice and protected by fur". The sadist, for Deleuze, is a control freak who seeks to impose that hardy psychoanalytic perennial, the Law of the Father, while the masochist's desire is to exclude the paternal by way of a contract between the chastising mother figure and the chastised male whose desire for consummation is frustrated. *Marienbad*'s M (the husband played by Sacha Pitoëff) might then be seen as cognate with the world of sadism, while his rival X (Giorgio Albertazzi), in his often thwarted yearning, approximates more closely that of masochism.

Teeth may be gritting by now at what may appear to be a futile attempt to shoehorn one of

VENUS IN FEATHERS

In 'Last Year in Marienbad', A (Delphine Seyrig, above) remains forever out of reach, as the fulfilment of desire is endlessly deferred

cinema's great ambiguous texts into a little-known theoretical paradigm. But Deleuze's schema does illuminate *Marienbad*'s visual and verbal texture productively. The visual and emotional climax of the film occurs in the sequence where, in heavily overexposed white footage, A (Seyrig) is seen repeatedly advancing towards X with arms outstretched. This replaced X's (clearly sadistic) taking of A by force in the original screenplay – true to the 'thinking person's dirty old man' persona of writer Alain Robbe-Grillet – with what has generally been read as a moment of ecstatic fusion and mutuality. Yet I would argue that the film's climax can also be read in terms of masochism, in that A can be seen as pushing X away, deferring the fulfilment of his desire. It's comparable to the moment at the end of James Cameron's *Titanic* – gleefully cited by Slavoj Žižek – when Rose, assuring the dead Jack that nothing can keep the two of them apart now, in fact makes the gesture of pushing him away.

The extraordinary impact of the *Marienbad* sequence resides not only in its ecstasy, but at the same time in its perversity. If X and A 'really' came together here once and for all, we should be close to the ultimate art-movie happy ending – and watching a very different film. A pushes X away, her partial withholding of openness paralleling the film's partial refusal of closure, ensuring that our desire to possess its sense is satisfied only in and through its deferral and frustration – and thus that glosses and commentaries such as this have continued, and will doubtless continue, unabated down the decades.

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18 CONTAINS STRONG BLOODY
VIOLENCE AND SUICIDE

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Director Bertrand Tavernier has a flair for turning historical research into vivid drama, as he proves once again with *'The Princess of Montpensier'*. By **Demetrios Matheou**

FLESH, BLOOD, PASSION



Bertrand Tavernier has always been a hard director to pin down. He's made period films and contemporary ones, politically charged and whimsical ones, working with established stars and with young unknowns. He's made swashbucklers, science fiction, a *policier*, and a film about a head teacher at a nursery school. His distaste for typecasting led him, when described as a "political filmmaker" after *The Judge and the Assassin* (*Le Juge et l'assassin*, 1975), to make the lyrical *Sunday in the Country* (*Un dimanche à la campagne*, 1984). When I tell him I never know what to expect from one film to the next, he replies with characteristic glee: "I want to put myself in that position – to never know where I will be. I love that!"

But while he's less of an auteur than the members of the *Cahiers* generation whom he followed into filmmaking (graduating from press agent and critic to fully fledged director with *The Watchmaker of St Paul* in 1973), Tavernier has nonetheless produced a body of work united by common themes and inclinations: political engagement, non-judgemental character study, naturalistic acting, dramatic verve allied to graceful camerawork – and lashings of humour, often when the plot is at its bleakest. Just as the period films are infused with a modern sensibility, so he insists that his contemporary work is informed by his love of history.

"Dealing with history teaches you to be analytical and teaches you to find out what's important," he told an NFT audience in 2002, on the release of his French resistance drama *Laissez-passer*. "Not conventional history, but the history told by the new breed of historians that shows that history is linked with fact, flesh, blood, passion.

It's not just about remembering dates – it's about making the history live."

He's back in period mode with *The Princess of Montpensier* (*La Princesse de Montpensier*), a film that has no shortage of flesh, blood and passion, and much absorbing detail. It's based on the short novel by Madame de Lafayette, published in 1662 but set a century earlier during the reign of Charles IX, a king best known for presiding over the turbulent French Wars of Religion.

The war, however, is merely the backdrop to a crazy love quadrangle, at the centre of which is the 16-year-old Marie de Mézières (Mélanie Thierry). Marie is in love with the fiery Duke of Guise (Gaspard Ulliel), known as "Scarface" and shown here with a habit of having his facial wounds reopened in the course of every battle. But instead she is forced to marry the Prince of Montpensier (Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet), to whom she is offered along with some peacocks and a couple of hens, in the usual indelicate transaction. Soon the Prince's best friend and mentor, the Count of

Chabannes (Lambert Wilson), also falls in love with the girl – as does the King's brother, the Duke of Anjou (Raphaël Personnaz). Tavernier follows his source's focus on these lovers and their immature, passionate, potentially violent rivalries, alongside which the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre seems like a trifling contretemps.

Any connection to Tavernier's *D'Artagnan's Daughter* (*La Fille de D'Artagnan*, 1994) – also co-scripted with his regular writer Jean Cosmos – ends at the swords and stately settings; where the earlier film was a tongue-in-cheek romp, this is an altogether more serious, dramatic and precise affair. Whether showing the embarrassing rituals of a noble wedding night, the backstage manoeuvring of a royal ball or the mud-spattered violence of a battlefield, Tavernier invests the tale with his characteristic attention to detail.

When I mention his hero Michael Powell's comment that one should never make a film unless one can learn something from it, Tavernier nods enthusiastically: "The pleasure is then communicating what I've discovered to the audience – things I find astonishing, or amusing. It's like you are receiving people at home, and you want to amuse, to move them. If you tell the same jokes over and over, people become exhausted. The aim is always to give the impression that what you are showing is new – something you are discovering for the first time."

Sometimes the director's research is integrated into character motivation, as in the case of Chabannes's desertion of the Huguenot cause. "I was trying to find something that would justify without words why someone would desert, and so put himself in great danger," he explains. "Madame de Lafayette gives a very abstract reason, which would not work on film. So I asked the historian



OBJECT OF DESIRE
Mélanie Thierry, right with Tavernier, plays the girl torn between husband (Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet, top left) and lover (Gaspard Ulliel, top right)



POWER PLAYER

Nicknamed "le balafré" – "the scarred one" – the Duke of Guise (Gaspard Ulliel, above) was a key Catholic leader in the French Wars of Religion

what were the three things considered a crime during that war. And he said: 'Destroying a plough, destroying a bread oven and killing a pregnant woman.'" One can guess which Tavernier chose.

Another discovery about the 17th century was that the wedding night in every noble family was a very public affair. "Actually, the first penetration had to be public," he elaborates, with delightful insistence, "because these families could only go to Rome to cancel the marriage if the girl was found not to be a virgin, or if the marriage had not been consummated. Suddenly I understood how so many royal wedding nights, which were a catastrophe, could provoke problems between countries. Louis XIII, the king in *The Three Musketeers*, couldn't do anything with his wife Anne for months – he never had the will to go back to the bedroom, and that created diplomatic problems between France and Spain, even the threat of a new war. Louis XVI with Marie Antoinette was a disaster too. They spent several months before he could fuck her."

Tavernier transforms this information into a wedding-night scene that's striking not just for Marie's humiliation – as the poor, naked girl is viewed by a dozen assistants, her husband and the two fathers (much how the actress herself might feel, exposed to cast and crew) – but also for its absurdity. Likewise the film's terrific battle scene is informed by Tavernier's discovery that soldiers in the period did not wear uniforms. "I asked the historian, 'How did they recognise each other?'" the director recalls. "And he said, 'They didn't. We assume now that 20 per cent of the casualties were

killed by their own comrades.' Knowing that helped me create that chaos in the battle."

While the scene has evoked comparisons to Orson Welles's *Chimes at Midnight* (1966), Tavernier himself prefers to cite Kurosawa: "I was trying to find that barbarian quality you had in Kurosawa. We shot fast, with no marks, no rehearsal, in just two days. There was no CGI – practically everything was done with one camera, with great work from the operator, the American Chris Wise. My desire was to show that those young men, the Prince and Guise, could be brutal, violent, ruthless. But when the Prince returns he is unable to say to a young girl, 'I love you.' And that moves me – that somebody can show off on the battlefield, but is paralysed in front of a girl."

One connection with Welles's film, he concedes, was the need to make financial constraints work to his advantage. "Constraint forces you to be intelligent, to find something spectacular in the landscape," he says. "We were very lucky – we had the rain, we had the mud. We lost about 30 pairs of shoes in the mud – we were glued to it – and that added a violence to the action. It was very exciting – apart from that the fact that I was never so cold in my life." Most 70-year-olds would not have gone near the field in the first place.

Back in 2002, Tavernier told the same NFT audience: "I am dubious about the idea of revisionism. I try to do a historical film as if it's a contemporary subject that I am filming." Thus he and Cosmos maintained the "twists in the plot" of their source, but changed the ending to make it less moralistic; Tavernier has more respect than the author for her heroine. "And of course I added some sex, which Madame De Lafayette was refusing, because she was writing in a puritan time, when they were putting fig leaves on statues. I needed to have a

love scene, even if you don't see anything, between Marie and Guise – you must have that."

His instruction to another regular collaborator, composer Philippe Sarde, was clear: "I didn't want any pseudo 16th-century music. Although Philippe drew his inspiration from composers of the time, we ensured the orchestration was very modern: cello, bass, trombones, percussion and three baroque instruments, but no violin, no lute, no piano. So the music sometimes sounds a little jazzy, like Charlie Mingus."

When I suggest that the film has an energy and matter-of-factness that distinguish it from so many costume dramas, he laughs: "Very often you watch the characters in a period film thinking that they are old – even when they're not – and you can't escape the impression that it happened 'a long time ago'. But no, for me it's happening today! I wanted to film these characters the way I filmed the cops in *L.627* [1992]. I wanted the pace, the rhythm to be fast. I wanted to capture the energy of these young people, who are eager to love, eager to succeed, eager to fight. Anjou was a general at 18 – you must have a lot of energy to achieve that."

Not surprisingly, Tavernier refuses to see the young woman who inadvertently leads so many men to distraction as feckless or *fatale*. "Marie is torn between what is expected of her, on the one hand, and her passion and desire on the other," he explains. "She refuses to be the submissive wife. She wants to educate herself and embrace the world. You can understand how she's torn between respect – even love – for her husband, and a sexual passion for Guise. Somebody said to me, 'But it's Lady Diana!'"

■ *'The Princess of Montpensier'* is released on 8 July, and is reviewed on page 74

A new DVD collection of films documenting British folk culture evokes a vanishing world for **Philip Hoare**, while overleaf folk-singing legend **Shirley Collins** remembers the pioneering field work of Alan Lomax and Peter Kennedy

LISTEN TO BRITAIN

Sir Thomas Beecham, the great music conductor, once declared that one should try anything once, except folk dancing and incest. Contrary to such antipathy, the term 'folk' has undergone a notable popular revival in recent years.

From a word of vague abuse, conjuring up sandals and earnestness, it has been reinvented for an age which, in reaction to the commodified and easily available, revalues the artisanal and the obscure. This is evident in the success of numerous bands and in fashion – there's even a London label that calls itself, baldly, Folk. Meanwhile, contemporary art has reappraised the term, from Simon Costin's Museum of British Folklore and the work of Southampton artist Jonny Hannah, to Jeremy Deller, whose ambitious and evocative examination of 'folk art' seeks the analogue in the age of the digital, the mysterious and the traditional in the face of a world dedicated only to the new.

Thus the BFI's release of a fascinating compendium of films about "folk customs and ancient rural games" is more than relevant – although Cecil Sharp, founder of the English Folk Dance Society in 1911, might counter that it was about time too. Sharp made his own Kinora spoofs – eerie, grainy recreations of folk dances – back in 1912, within sight of the century in which they had last flourished, even as the young men who were performing them so acrobatically in white shirts bleached by the sun were about to experience the Armageddon that gave every British village a stone cross inscribed with the dead.

Tradition, whether revived or even invented, suffuses this collection with a sense of the past seen through a telescope, compressed by the distance between our now and their then. In the title piece, *Here's a Health to the Barley Mow* (1952), directed by the folklorist Peter Kennedy, we move along a Suffolk quayside that's virtually unchanged since the 19th century or earlier, and into the Ship Inn, Blaxhall, near Woodbridge. Inside, the regulars are arrayed in equally undatable costume. We're in the 1950s, but we might as well be at any point in time in the deep rural past. Fair Isle jumpers and cloth caps; tweed coats and stout boots; lace collars and round spectacles; neat print dresses and dark red lipstick. These are long-lost textures, and this is no chain pub. Everyone is smoking and drinking warm, dark beer; tobacco and yeast lie tangibly over the interior, as pewter pint pots are ranged over the bar. Full face to camera, the throaty singers perform unabashed, singing the round of "Good luck to the Barley Mow" with gusto, to the accompaniment of the accordion, the default instrument throughout these films, an insistent, ever-present whine made sad by its continual deflation.

There's no cult of youth here. Toothless men sit alongside young women; the only entertainment is the human voice and wind through reeds. The singers do not so much sing as declare; they might ➤



KEEPERS OF THE FLAME
Sword dancers, photographed in 1952, top, and in Grenoside in 1965, below, and mummers, opposite, are among the different folk groups documented by filmmakers





PHOTOGRAPH BY E.C. WHITE



ETPSS (1)

British Folk Films

'Oss Oss Wee Oss' is the most lively of these films, bursting with sound and colour



LIVING TRADITION
Shot in Padstow in 1951, Alan Lomax's film 'Oss Oss Wee Oss' in turn had a lasting effect on the ritual it documented

as well be itinerant preachers as pub songsters. A pastoral dandy, with a white silk scarf around his neck and a watch chain dangling from his waistcoat, looks on as the village cobbler mimes his craft, banging the heel of one shoe on the other on his knee, singing "twine twiddle-oh twine" as he stitches with invisible thread. It's a vaguely disturbing scene; one might be in a local asylum. Two men get up to step-dance face to face, their frenetic footwork weaving a pattern on the floor.

Throughout these films, one might inevitably ask: what are we being presented with here? What vision of the past – which was of course the present, then? Two decades after Kennedy's film came *Derby Tup* (1974), directed by Ian Russell in Ridgeway, a Derbyshire village stranded between the past and the future, clinging to its rurality yet subject to the gravitational pull of Sheffield, the steel city. In a back kitchen, three wiry lads in their mid-teens are using soot from the stove to blacken their faces. One has a pillow stuffed down the dress he is wearing, in home-grown pantomimic travesty. They enter the local pub, along with a fourth member crouched on all fours and covered in a sheepskin with carved wooden horns.

What's so remarkable about this scene, as the young men launch into their performance, is the disconnect between now and then – the very notion of teenage boys singing "fol-di-diddly-i-ay". But they do it seriously, and well. The "Derby Tup" is the monstrous sheep they're bringing to market – big enough to cover an acre – which is then ritually slaughtered with a bash on the head with a stick. "All the boys in Derby, came begging for his eyes/To kick around as footballs, for they were just the size." The omnipresent sociological voiceover informs us that this ancient rite may reach back to the 7th century, when their predecessors performed "clad in the skin of animals". Our modern shape-shifter, however, has flashing light bulbs for eyes.

The 'Derby Tup' is performed by boys aged 11 to 17, we're told. It is a "kind of secret society outside of school or church", self-organised, and there are "very good reasons for its survival". The "positive benefits" include "status, excitement and, chiefly, money". The mummers may collect £20 a night

visiting pubs on Christmas or New Year's Eve – "a significant sum" for such families. The performance "answers practical needs... enough to ensure its survival".

Then we're introduced to the latest recruits. The new young gang are wearing penny-round Ben Sherman collars and baggy trousers, their hair is long and feather-cut, and the performance is slightly less convincing, perhaps because of encroaching pop culture. Will the 'Derby Tup' still endure in the age of punk to come, and all that is to follow? For all the post-war backwash, one can almost hear the first synthesiser notes of The Human League in the background; these scenes may well have been the last of their kind. As folklore expert Steve Roud, an advisor to this collection, notes drily of another sequence: "Today, it is increasingly difficult to find teenagers who wish to be dressed as queens and ladies-in-waiting, and to be crowned 'Queen of the May'."

Alan Lomax's *Oss Oss Wee Oss* (1953) is probably the most lively of all these films, although not without its inconsistencies. There's an immense and not unknowing charm to the piece, bursting with sound and colour, as if uncontained by the mere medium alone. Charlie Chilton, our central-casting Cockney narrator, apparently down for the day from Stepney, takes us to the Cornish village of Padstow, a place whose fame has long since been subsumed by Mr Stein and his fish and chips. This "sunny little fishing port... famous for wrecks and ships gone wrong" is already remaindered. "Today the fishing fleet stays at home." A local sailor is seated on the quayside, the inevitable accordion in his arms. "What's all this about?" asks our cheery Cockney – then proceeds to answer his own question. "Some say it's two thousand, three thousand, four thousand years old... a sexy, savage springtime rite." (In fact, Steve Roud observes in his notes to the collection, "It is now generally agreed that the mummers' play custom only dates from the mid or late eighteenth century, although the tradition of performing short plays at Christmas is older.")

The excitement builds in the pub the night before. In a scene that recalls nothing so much as a Northern Soul nightclub, two young men with floppy hair but short back and sides dance around

each other, throwing shapes of arms and legs within each other's airspace before falling to the floor to spin. They look like mating birds, but they're practising for the forthcoming festivities. "Summer is a-coming," sing the carousers outside the pub in the dark, announcing the impending May Day morning.

Then out comes the hobby-horse, to the children's chants of "Oss Oss, Wee Oss!" It's a fantastic scene. Like all such figures, part man, part animal, the horse itself is surrounded by a kind of hooped tarpaulin skirt – our Cockney tells us it was once covered in tar, and any young woman whom the horse kissed and thus stained would be married within a year. Out of nearby woods, men and boys emerge bearing sycamore branches to be tied to telegraph poles as temporary bowers. Other garlands are made from cowslip, bluebell and primrose, "thanks to the squire". The hierarchy remains in place – but it is about to be overcome by a day of anarchy. (We're told that "influential people" had attempted to suppress the hobby-horse, without success.)

Suddenly the streets are filled with characters out of a picture by Edward Burra or John Minton. Sailors in white caps, others in spotted handkerchiefs and flowers; everything is red, blue and white; the spirit of the Festival of Britain presides over the film. (Peter Kennedy, who produced *Oss Oss Wee Oss*, admitted that the people of Padstow dressed up for the occasion for the first time, and wore the same costumes for two years afterwards – thus the film itself engendered its own tradition.) Amidst this bacchanalia, the hobby-horse is killed, like the Derby Tup, only to rise again, a resurrection heralding "the springtime soil, that brings the crops out of the ground". But as William Fowler, co-curator of this collection, notes: "There are questions to be asked here about whom the film was made for, and why it had to be made if – as we see here – the custom is maintained so voraciously. Was it intended as a document of survival? These questions, difficult to answer, inevitably lead us back to the issues of paternalism."

There's a sense of the reclamation of English culture, a notional security in an unchanged past. There are no politics, at least on the surface. This is

THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Folk singer **Shirley Collins** recalls the pioneering work of Alan Lomax and Peter Kennedy, who documented folk culture in field recordings and films

Although of course their field sound recordings were the main part of their work, it was important to Alan [Lomax] and Peter [Kennedy] to document folk tradition on film when they had the opportunity (there was never much money around). Alan was a gifted photographer too – he took great pictures of Spanish and Italian peasants and fishermen in the early 1950s, and of prisoners in the Mississippi State Penitentiary.

I first met Alan around 1954 in London at a party Ewan MacColl threw for him on his return from his Spanish field trip. I fell in love with him on the spot, perhaps partly because I loved all the music I'd heard him play on BBC radio – an overwhelming combination. Peter I first met at Cecil Sharp House, headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) when I attended the sing-arounds he set up to give young people the opportunity not only to perform but to hear genuine traditional singers he brought up from the country. I have a lot to thank Peter for, and still do – I've just finished compiling three CDs of his field recordings from Southern England made in the 1950s and 60s.

Peter brought so much enthusiasm to the folk revival and was, I think, crucial in ridding the EFDSS of its rather class-bound state – he was genuinely working at bringing in ordinary people, whose music it was, after all. You can feel that spirit in *Oss Oss Wee Oss* [1953, directed by Lomax and produced by Kennedy]. It'd been 30 years or more since I saw the film, but I watched it again with delight, and felt how well it captured the spirit of May Day in Padstow in 1951 and the character of the people.

The narrator Charles Chilton, with his broad London accent, was absolutely spot on for that time when broadcasting voices were so dreadfully refined, whereas his sits comfortably alongside the Cornish voices. Alan would have wanted to add that common touch so the film wasn't perceived as a documentary for academics to evaluate, but one the ordinary viewer could enjoy. *Oss Oss Wee Oss* very much bears Alan's stamp. When the narrator talks about it being a "sexy springtime rite", that's pure Alan – he saw sex in everything!

It's remarkable how erotic some of it is. Take the scene in the Golden Lion pub on the night before May Day, where the two men are dancing and enacting being horses – it's almost uncomfortably erotic. They're on all fours sniffing around each other until finally one man lays his large, sunburned hand on the head of the other, turning it, caressing his oiled curls. It's extraordinary. I'm surprised that scene got past the censors in those days – or perhaps they weren't aware of what they were seeing. Then, too, the scene where one of the



RITE OF SPRING

The Padstow hobby-horse ritual captured in 'Oss Oss Wee Oss', above, by Alan Lomax and Peter Kennedy, remembered here by Shirley Collins, top

local girls is running down to see the Oss, and the lines of the May song say "and all her body under as white as any milk". It really strikes you that this is a fertility ceremony.

There's a rumour that Peter provided the Oss crew with red spotted handkerchiefs to tie round their necks and heads to add more colour and dash, giving them a piratical look – and it may well be true, as photographs from earlier years show them dressed in white with white fishermen's caps. The smuggler look still persists to this day, so obviously the idea went down well! The film drew attention to the event and hordes of people since have turned up to see it from all over the world. Do the locals resent this intrusion into what is, after all, a local custom? I don't know.

I love the scene with the old colonel in the pub speaking about the Oss – he was so wonderfully drunk he couldn't even get the name of the pub right. There are charming shots of the children appearing along the ridge of a hill, running through the town, and disappearing round a corner with the skirt of their own hobby-horse flying. The whole town takes part – as their song says, "Unite and unite and let us all unite..."

It's touching to see how involved the children are (the best way to make sure a tradition keeps going), especially that moving scene where old Mac, now in a bath chair and unable to take part,

gravely passes on to his young grandson the decorated club so that he can lead the horse for the first time. There is such an anxious look on the boy's face – a moment's hesitation, then a surge of pride as off he goes, dancing the proper steps. That's one of the things that sets Padstow apart: the strange dance with the rigid arm and leg movements. There are skirted hobby-horses all over England, but as far as I'm aware, the Padstow dance is unique. The Oss is impudent, a bit threatening, and there's a frisson of something you can't quite put your finger on.

While Alan was able to talk and write about folk-song in his vivid, often romantic way, Peter conveyed all that in his films. Peter had a genuine understanding and a fine visual imagination; his remarkably sensitive eye is evident in his other films. In *One Potato, Two Potatoes* [1957, photographed by Kennedy], the way he captures children's games in a bomb-damaged post-war Camden Town is remarkable – and all so recognisable to me, although I grew up in Hastings. We played in the streets, we skipped, we sang, we sailed paper boats in water-filled gutters, we were as grubby and poorly dressed as the children in the film. Yet as I watched it, I thought to myself how free they seemed. They had the ability to amuse themselves, unaware that they were unconsciously carrying on an old tradition of songs and games.

Shirley Collins was talking to James Bell. Her compilations of Peter Kennedy's 1950s and 60s Southern England field recordings are out on CD later this year in Topic Records' 'Voice of the People' series

British Folk Films

OLD AND NEW
The ancient ritual represented by the Burry Man of South Queensferry contrasts with the industrial modernity of the Forth Bridge in the background



◀ a monocultural world, for all that the Empire Windrush might be disembarking in the Port of London; there are no foreign faces, only those to which soot has been applied. This is not so much nostalgia as something out of reach, an evocation of the outdoors, the amateur and the unorganised and unofficial – a rejection of the prevailing order yet an acceptance of it too. Yet as Fowler intimates, we must ask how much of this is real? How far is it stage-managed? In a postmodern context, each one of these films could be an elaborate set-up, a Jeremy Deller recreation. (Indeed, Deller's own films documenting folk customs, *Shrovetide Football*, *Ashbourne*, 2000, and *Hare Pie and Bottle Kicking*, *Hallaton*, 2005, are included in this set.)

Out of the past

The flag of St George flies unironically over these scenes. *Walk in St George* (1952) is bright in saturated yet faded colour, with a cast including Saints George and Patrick, and Father Christmas. Its colour refutes a world battered by war, even as it re-enacts an ancient struggle. As they process down the village lane – Symondsburry in Dorset, deep in Thomas Hardy's Wessex – the mummers appear to be walking out of the past and into the future, in a manner that evokes, for me at least, the work of Nicolas Roeg (who was DP on 1967's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, filmed in the same county and itself including 'authentic' folk songs).

The costumes are extraordinary: men with beribboned heads, like a kind of English *commedia dell'arte* troupe or something out of a Polynesian tribal rite, both eerie and anachronistic – for all the handsome smiles on the faces underneath in the final revelation scene. (Their transformation is mirrored by the collection's other outstanding scene of otherness: the Burry Man of South Queensferry, covered head to toe in sticky burrs and paraded around the Scottish village – part Green Man, part *Wicker Man*, part surrealist installation – in Doc Rowe's 2002 film.) Beaming at the camera, these young men are not shell-shocked like their brothers or fathers or grandfathers – a shadow represented by the Hardy-esque characters supping their beer behind them. (One might recall here that Hardy himself, who lived through World

War I, oversaw a number of silent film adaptations of his novels from 1913 onwards.) Their young faces are unscarred by war; like the Padstow hobby-horse, they are signs of resurrection.

Alan Simpson's *Wake Up and Dance* (1950), made for the English Folk Dance and Song Society, is a more extravagant set piece filmed in Stratford-upon-Avon. It too seems a bold rearguard action, as men and women are summoned from the suburbs and washing lines to dance in the fields as a kind of 1950s flash mob. There's a joy to these scenes, for all that they might be compared to another, darker kind of monoculture enacted only a few years earlier in Germany, Italy and Spain. They're caught in a time loop in which nothing changes, a sense of stasis even as they whirl around, changing partners clad in clothes from a pre-acrylic world. There's a Betjemanesque longing here, albeit without the irony; a *Shell Guide* view of England via Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger.

Indeed, like Powell and Pressburger's work, many of these mid-century films reflect a peculiarly British art movement, identified in the 1930s as 'Neo-Romantic' and celebrated by curator David Mellor in his 1987 Barbican Art Gallery exhibition *A Paradise Lost*. Then Dr Mellor noted that the movement had been "edited out of the history of British art and culture". The same might be said of these films. They do not record revolution or political shifts – they are memorials to the reverse. In fact, what is striking about viewing them now, from the perspective of the 21st century, is their sense of consensus. They propose – or commemorate – an *agreed* world, with all in common. They draw on a pre- as opposed to post-imperial world. And whether or not these rituals were invented two hundred or two thousand years ago, a pre-Christian, pagan DNA runs through them too.

Yet more deeply and, in its own way, more darkly evocative is Leslie Daiken's *One Potato, Two Potatoes*, "made on a shoestring budget thanks to a £551 grant awarded by the BFI Experimental Film Fund", as Christophe Dupin notes. This beautiful film depicts children's games and songs in a post-war world – the same rituals of the playground that I myself recall from suburban Southampton in the 1960s. Girls did indeed spend all their spare

time skipping – tantalising, rhythmic, expressive. The children here seem physically different: pale, sinewy, reared on austerity diets, singing obscure rhymes that were the argot of break time: "one, two, three, O'Leary", "hick, hack, first crack, conqueror of eleven", "plawsy, clapsy, turns the wheels to backsy".

Photographed by Peter Kennedy in Camden Town in 1957, *One Potato, Two Potatoes* plays out on bomb sites reminiscent of Bill Brandt's early photographs, in streets largely empty of cars, and in gutters where boys in grey shorts (I wore the same) float paper boats, to a soundtrack of received songs: 'The Big Ship Sails on the Alley-Alley-o', 'Oranges and Lemons' and the positively mournful 'Poor Jenny Is A-Weeping'. Like others in the compilation, this film strays into liminal territory, a lyrical darkness incarnate out of an imagination filled with strange and sometimes threateningly innocent images. "As I went out to buy some eggs/ Who did I meet but bandy legs?"

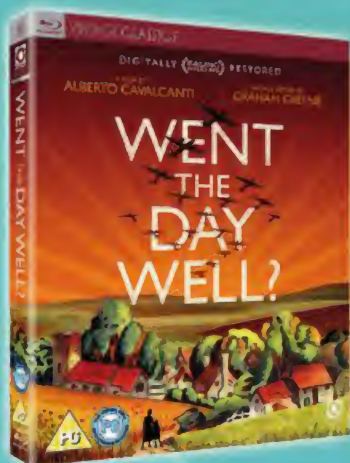
Bonfire Night is followed by the song 'London's Burning', over blasted streets that had recently yielded their own charred bodies. "He who fights and runs away/ Lives to fight another day." Boys act out their own battles in *Lord of the Flies* scenes, singing "I'm the king of the castle" on heaps of rubble. It's a sensibility evident on the other side of the country, in John Bartlett's *Children of the Moor* (1975) where, a generation later, Devon children re-enact May Day and mummers' plays in a manner that's both ancient and playful, with a sense of something sliding out of reach even as the cameras roll.

Writing about the film, Daiken said he wanted to "communicate this powerful force in childhood... something of a Mystery when looked at in wonderment by adults who have grown away from the innocence, the compulsion and the ritualism of the young". So, too, do we look on all these scenes – suffused with nostalgia and illusion, with suppression and expression – and wonder if we ever inhabited the same world.

■ The two-DVD collection *Here's a Health to the Barley Mow: A Century of Folk Customs and Ancient Rural Games* is released by the BFI on 18 July

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BETWEEN THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION

Winner of Best Screenplay at Cannes last year, 'Poetry' is the first of Lee Chang-Dong's features to receive a cinema release in the UK. But for the past 15 years he has played a crucial role in South Korean cultural life, says **Tony Rayns**



POET AND MUSE
'Poetry', the fifth film
by writer-director
Lee Chang-Dong,
above, gives veteran
actress Yun Jung-Hee,
facing page, the role
of her life

Lee Chang-Dong is one of a kind in Korean film culture, and it's hard to think of anyone quite like him working anywhere else either. *Poetry* (Si, 2010), his fifth feature as writer-director, is his best yet; last year Tim Burton's Cannes jury gave it a prize for its screenplay, but the real strength in Lee's films is not just the writing but the 'poetic' ability to dramatise unspoken thoughts and feelings. He creates fraught situations – murders, suicides, gang violence, a kidnapping, a 'scandalous' sexual liaison – and uses them to see where social, psychological and sexual pressures intersect. He doesn't do melodrama as such, but heightens everyday routines and behaviour to reveal the impulses, attitudes and compulsions that usually stay hidden.

Poetry follows Bong Joon-Ho's *Mother* (Mado, 2009) in giving a veteran actress the role of her life. The protagonist Yang Mija (played by Yun Jung-Hee, a top star in the 1960s and 70s who gave it all up to move to Paris with her concert-pianist husband) is a 66-year-old widow living in a dormitory town outside Seoul. She is looking after her grandson Wook (played by David Lee as the quintessential teenage brat) while his divorced mother tries to make a new start in faraway Busan. Mija, still dressing as the pretty young girl she always

hoped to be seen as, works some afternoons as domestic help for a man of her own age who has been left part-paralysed by a stroke. Near the start we see her impulsively signing up (she's missed the deadline) for a one-month poetry-writing class at the local community centre, and visiting a clinic in the local hospital for a minor consultation – only to learn that her increasing tendency to forget words is probably an early symptom of Alzheimer's. It's an exquisite conundrum: can a woman who is beginning to lose language learn to write a poem?

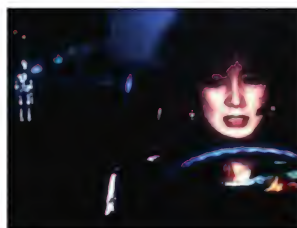
However, Lee plays out Mija's predicament in a wider context. (Spoiler alert: this paragraph discusses plot points which are revealed only gradually in the film.) The film opens and closes at the river near the town. In the first scene, a boy playing on the bank with his friends spots the corpse of a teenage girl floating face down in the water. Soon after, Mija sees the victim's distraught mother at the hospital. It emerges that the girl threw herself into the river after being raped repeatedly in the school science lab by a gang of six boys – one of whom was Wook.

Mija, always frustrated by Wook's truculent and selfish behaviour, cannot comprehend the boy's seeming lack of remorse. Against her will, she finds herself drawn into a cover-up by the parents of the other boys. But Mija's thoughts are haunted by the ➤





The titles of all five of his films invoke lost or elusive idylls which the characters reach for in moments of doubt and pain



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM
Clockwise from above:
'Oasis', 'Secret Sunshine', 'Green Fish', 'Peppermint Candy'

dead girl, who she never met. She struggles to follow the poetry teacher's instructions to see more intensely what's around her, but the words she eventually finds to write her poem spring from her empathy with the dead girl, not from her observations. Without even consciously trying, she *feels* intensely for what is perhaps the first time in her life – and acts on her feelings. Lee makes it clear that Mija's empathy is rooted in her unexpected need to rethink her own attitudes to sexuality; brilliantly integrated subplots involving the stroke victim and a libidinous policeman-poet are the triggers.

The policeman, who shocks Mija by reciting his ribald verse at a poetry reading, has an interesting backstory. It turns out that he was demoted from a better post in Seoul to this backwater because he blew the whistle on corruption in the force. This is the film's only direct reference to South Korea's political realities, but it comes from an author who is widely seen in Korea as a political figure, and not only because he served as the country's minister of culture from 2002 to 2004. You wouldn't know it from his IMDb biography, but Lee Chang-Dong's entire career is in fact inextricably linked with Korean politics.

Oppositional culture

Lee, who was born in 1954, was working as a schoolteacher in the 1980s when he began publishing the fiction and directing the plays which made him a culture hero to the Left. Oppositional culture was of necessity largely underground at the time; it had been stoked by the massacre of civilians by paratroopers on the streets of Gwangju in 1980, and by successive waves of repression. The enormous social and cultural shift which followed South Korea's transition from military to civilian government in 1993 had far-reaching effects on the film industry: restrictions on production, on the import of foreign films and on proscribed individuals and topics were all lifted.

Park Kwang-Su (born 1955), who had managed to make three politically charged features under the military regime, took advantage of both the relaxation of censorship and the now-legal access to funding from abroad to make a film based on two stories by the radical writer Im Chul-Woo, denouncing both Korean patriarchal ideology and atrocities committed by the South Korean army during the Korean War. This was *To the Starry Island* (*Gue Seom-ae Gako Sipda*, 1993), co-produced (and screened just once) by Channel 4. Park invited Lee Chang-Dong to collaborate on the script, and Lee, already thinking of switching from literature to cinema, asked to work as assistant director too. The production was, in effect, his film school. He went on to write Park Kwang-Su's next film *A Single Spark* (*Jeon Tae-Il*, 1995), a biopic about one of Korea's first labour-activist martyrs, which was financed entirely by public subscription.

This is where the story becomes a little more bizarre. Film star Moon Sung-Kun and stage star Myung Kay-Nam, prominent leftist actors who had both appeared in *To the Starry Island*, teamed up with another friend to form what they jokingly called "The Committee to Make Lee Chang-Dong a Director". A year of lobbying and hustling for money later, the committee had morphed into a

company called East Film, which produced Lee's first three features: *Green Fish* (Chorok Mulgoki, 1996), *Peppermint Candy* (Bakha Satang, 2000) and *Oasis* (2002). (All three went straight to DVD in Britain, incidentally, and are currently available at knockdown prices.)

In 2002, however, Roh Moo-Hyun came to power as the country's third civilian president and invited Lee to become the minister of culture. It was an unhappy administration from the start, riven by corruption scandals and political misjudgements; Roh committed suicide a few years after his term ended. During Lee's two years in the post, the ministry came under sustained pressure from Jack Valenti and the Motion Picture Association of America to scrap the 'quota' which guarantees Korean films a certain number of days on Korean screens each year. The film industry rose up as one to defend the quota (veteran director Im Kwon-Taek shaved his head in public at one protest rally), but Lee was forced by his political masters to oversee a reduction in the number of quota days. This was obviously embarrassing for Lee himself, but also for the likes of Moon Sung-Kun and Myung Kay-Nam, who had actively campaigned for Roh's election. Lee resigned in 2004, and stayed out of the public eye for the next three years.

He returned to filmmaking with *Secret Sunshine* (Miryang, 2007), which premiered in Cannes and won Jeon Do-Yeon the Best Actress prize. (This remains unreleased in Britain, although you can find subtitled DVDs online.) And now there's *Poetry*, winner of another Cannes prize. In the note he wrote for the film's press kit, Lee struck a rather plaintive note. He drew a parallel between poetry and film, but not the one that Jonas Mekas used to draw in the heyday of the New York underground. It's worth quoting in full:

"These are times when poetry is dying away. Some lament the loss, while others think poetry deserves to die. Nonetheless, people go on reading and writing poetry. What then does it mean to be writing poetry when the form's prospects seem so dismal? This is a question I wanted to raise. But it's essentially the same question that I pose to myself as a filmmaker. What does it mean to be making films at a time when film is dying away?"

In one way this is the familiar 'death of cinema' mantra – the feeling that a 20th-century art is on the way out in the 21st century. But, as the comparison with the plight of poetry suggests, it's also a little different. Lee, after all, is not coming to his profession as a movie brat. He's a relative late-comer to filmmaking, and not in any sense a child of the film industry. Coming from him, the question has an almost existential thrust. It's the lament of a serious-minded moralist who sees less and less reason to be cheerful about things in general, not just the future of cinema.

His own back catalogue makes his case. The titles of all five of his films invoke lost or elusive idylls which the characters reach for in moments of doubt and pain. The green fish is a childhood memory, recalled at the point of death. The peppermint candies were enclosed with love letters sent to the antihero while he was doing his compulsory military service in 1980, before his life was ruined. The oasis is depicted on a small tapestry hanging in a dingy apartment (the scene comes to life in a



GENERATION GAP
In 'Poetry', Mija (Yun Jung-Hee, left) tries to make sense of a terrible crime involving her grandson Wook (David Lee, right)

fleeting fantasy). 'Secret Sunshine' is the literal translation of the Chinese characters once used to write the name of the town Miryang, the setting of the film, now a hotbed of crime, paedophile murder and Pentecostal fundamentalism. And poetry is precisely what is missing from Mija's life. These symbols are not Proustian madeleines, bringing back the past, but tokens of estrangement from decent, fulfilling lives. Lee Chang-Dong may not like what he sees around him these days, but he's under no illusion that the past was better.

Years of darkness

Lee's first two films were essentially protests against what Koreans call the 'years of darkness' under brutal military governments and martial law. *Green Fish* is the nearest he has ever come to a genre movie. It shows the downfall of a well-intentioned but not very smart young man (played by Han Suk-Kyu), jobless after doing his military service, who is drawn disastrously into a gangster milieu by chance encounters with a masochistic femme fatale. The film suggests that the 1980s made violence endemic in Korean life, and that the economic miracle of the 1990s has broken up families and destroyed humane relationships. The perceptions seem commonplace now, but Korea needed to hear them in the mid-1990s – and the film's remarkable, heartbreaking coda erases any sense that platitudes are being uttered.

Peppermint Candy chronicles one man's life from 1979 to 1999, but in reverse chronology: it opens with his suicide at the age of 40 and then winds back through the years to the time when he was tremulously eager and optimistic about his future. Yongho (played stupendously by the stage-trained Sol Kyung-Gu, then more than a little reminiscent of the young Robert De Niro) is seen to have lost it during his military service, when he was sent to participate in the Gwangju massacre. The experience left him traumatised (his rejection of his childhood sweetheart must be one of the cruellest scenes ever filmed), and subsequent stints as a police torturer of trade-union activists and as a businessman cheated by his partners finish him off. In short: Korean society ruins lives. The film is primarily an act of exorcism.

The three later films are more nuanced, less clear-cut. *Oasis* incorporates a fair amount of social criticism, but centres on a highly credible, sexual love story – between a young woman with cerebral palsy and a somewhat simple-minded ex-con. The central characters (played by Moon So-Ri and Sol Kyung-Gu, both heroic) are seen as individuals,

not as aggregations of disability symptoms, and their highs and lows are more than affecting. Lee rather overeggs the pudding by making both of them victims of their families – he served time for his brother; she was exploited by her brother to get himself better housing – but it is first and foremost a love story.

Secret Sunshine details the mental collapse of a woman who has lost her husband and goes on to lose her son too, all in the process of moving to a new home and in the context of constant harassment from evangelical Pentecostals. Again, there's a background hum of critical social commentary, but you can sense that the main target is the ubiquity of proselytising Christians in South Korea. In this case, the 'secret sunshine' is as much a token of hankering for an idealised future as for an idealised past.

Poetry synthesises the strengths of all these films and, befitting Mija's age, does so without resorting to onscreen violence or hysteria. It consolidates Lee's reputation as a director of actors: Yun Jung-Hee is perfect as the old woman approaching a second childhood when she never really came to terms with the first one, but everyone around her, right down to the bit-players, is equally convincing. (Watching it, I was reminded of something Song Kang-Ho told me during the shooting of *Secret Sunshine*. "He sometimes wants six or seven takes!" – clearly not a problem the actor has when he works with Kim Jee-Woon. Song was brought into films by Lee Chang-Dong – he plays an uncouth gangster in *Green Fish* – and has the highest regard for the director.) *Poetry* looks and feels like a film in which the actors are genuine co-creators. Lee is writing scenes which give them every opportunity to inhabit their roles.

Three of Lee's five films to date have featured characters with disabilities. Here, it's the elderly male stroke victim who has managed to procure some Viagra; in *Green Fish* and *Oasis*, they are characters with cerebral palsy. One of the measures of Lee's singularity is his refusal to leave disabled people off screen. Another is his insistence on writing them as people in most respects like any other, with needs, aspirations and dreams, even if they can't express them verbally. And that's the key to Lee's particular talent: his ability to work with actors – and cinematographers, editors, designers and costumiers – to say what cannot or should not be said. To photograph a thought.

■ 'Poetry' is released on 29 July, and is reviewed on page 73

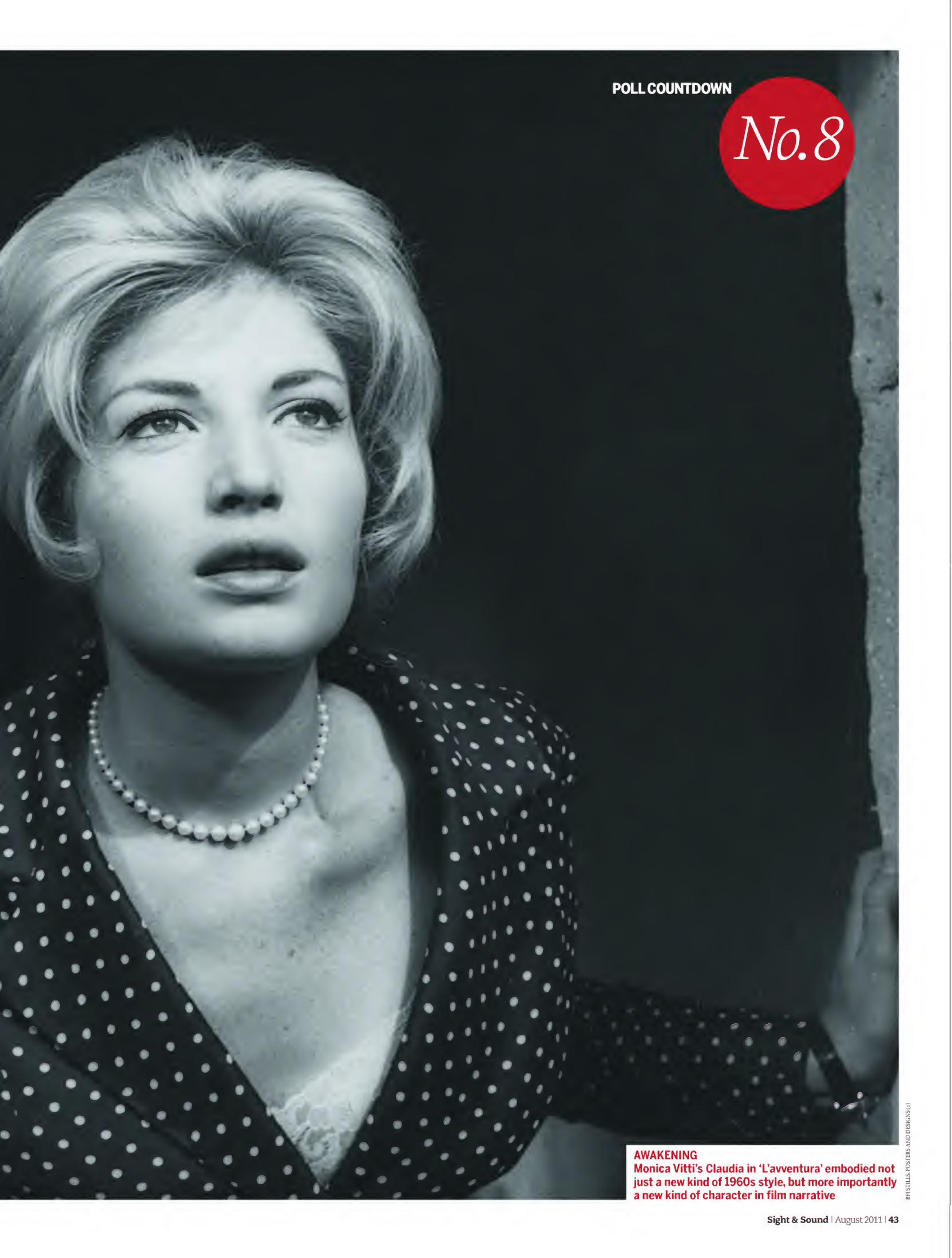
Antonioni's *L'avventura* is now more influential than ever, argues **Robert Koehler** in the latest of our series on 'top ten' contenders for next year's Sight & Sound poll

GREAT WIDE OPEN

When Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* arrived in 1960 – amidst a tumultuous reception in Cannes that saw some disturbed audience members wanting to throw something at the screen – cinema was already changing in fundamental ways. The makers of individual, handmade films that had been institutionally kept out on the fringes (Stan Brakhage, Shirley Clarke, Norman McLaren, to name but three) were starting to draw more viewers and critical attention. The narrative feature film underwent a revision, from inside the *nouvelle vague* (Godard's *Breathless*) and out (Agnès Varda's first films, Alain Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad*). Meanwhile the Italian film world had already seen the old codes of neorealism swept away – much of it Antonioni's own doing – and had moved towards a post-neorealist cinema liberated from melodrama and political ideologies, perhaps best exemplified in 1959 by Ermanno Olmi's first feature *Time Stood Still*.

A new, maturing modernity became widespread in cinema. The years 1959 to 1960 can be identified as a world-historical moment for film. In line with ➡



A black and white photograph of actress Monica Vitti. She is looking upwards and to the left with a contemplative expression. She has short, light-colored hair. She is wearing a dark, polka-dot jacket over a light-colored lace-trimmed top, and a single-strand pearl necklace. The background is dark and out of focus.

POLL COUNTDOWN

No. 8

AWAKENING

Monica Vitti's Claudia in 'L'avventura' embodied not just a new kind of 1960s style, but more importantly a new kind of character in film narrative

BY STILL, POSTERS AND DESIGN (1)



TWO PLUS ONE
'L'avventura' seems to follow Anna (Lea Massari, top left) and Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti, right), before Claudia (Monica Vitti, below left) takes centre stage

of *L'avventura*'s many remarkable qualities to note now is its staying power – its ability to astonish anew after repeated viewings. Many great films are of their moment, yet lessen over time. Here, the entrance of Monica Vitti, with her classically hip black dress and sexily tousled blonde mane, amounts to an announcement that the 60s have arrived; a lesser work with her in it would be no more than a key identifier of that moment.

It's the film's subtle straddling of an older world and a new one still in the process of defining itself – reflected immediately and perfectly in composer Giovanni Fusco's opening title theme, alternating between nostalgic Sicilian strummings and nervous, creeping percussive beats – that establishes its rich, unending landscapes of physical reality and the mind. This is part of the film's timelessness, within an absolutely contemporary/modern setting. The early images of *L'avventura* trace a parting of the generations, as Anna (Lea Massari) – seemingly the film's central character – tells her wealthy Roman father that she's going away on a holiday to Sicily with girlfriend Claudia (Vitti), then seen very much on the periphery of the action, tagging along. But after Anna inexplicably disappears during a boat trip to an uninhabited island, it is Claudia who moves to the centre of the narrative – and into the affections of Anna's architect boyfriend Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) – as attempts to find Anna gradually peter out.

What makes *L'avventura* the greatest of all films, however, is its assertion, exploration and expan-

One of L'avventura's many remarkable qualities now is its staying power – its ability to astonish anew

the development of lenses, film stocks and new and smaller cameras, (including a more ubiquitous use of 16mm), the modernism that took hold showed yet again the time lag after which cinema typically comes to embrace changes that have occurred first in other artforms: for instance, the radical overhaul of jazz by bebop; the transformation of the sound world of music by such figures as Edgard Varèse and Harry Partch; the abstract-expressionist movement in painting from Pollock to Rothko; the 'new novel' invading literature (on which *Marienbad* drew, courtesy of a script by novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet).

In this exceptional moment, some of cinema's old props were being kicked away, including Hollywood's genre formulae, the three-act narrative structure, the privileging of psychology, the insistence on happy and 'closed' endings. But what did it mean to free oneself of the securing laws and traditions of genre, its capacity for creating worlds and codes? What did it mean to reject a storytelling architecture that had served dramatists well since Aeschylus? What kind of moving-image experience with actors could exist beyond psychology – which, after all, was still on the 20th century's new frontier of science and society? What if endings were less conclusive, or less 'satisfying'? These are the questions Antonioni confronted and responded to with *L'avventura*, the film that – more than any other at that moment – redefined the landscape of the artform, and mapped a new path that still influences today's most venturesome and radical young filmmakers.

For some that film would instead be *Breathless*. Godard's accidental discovery of the jump cut (courtesy of his editor) helped him rejig a more conventional yet sly imagining of the crime movie into a piece of radical art, a way of fracturing time as important as Picasso's and Braque's Cubist fracturing of space and perception. It's also arguable that Godard had the more immediate impact, especially through the 1960s, since his taste for pop-culture iconography, graphic wordplay and politics positioned him a bit closer to the centre of the period's cultural zeitgeist than Antonioni (despite the Italian's subsequent ability to capture swinging London and *The Yardbirds* in 1966's *Blowup*, and Los Angeles counterculture in 1970's *Zabriskie Point*). Even a movie with huge pop figures and crossover attraction like Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) would have been unthinkable without the example of Godard.

Yet I'd argue that *L'avventura* and Antonioni's subsequent films – perhaps most importantly *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*, 1962) – have exerted a greater long-term impact (his effect on the generations after the 1960s is something I'll consider later). One

sion of the concept of the 'open film'. This had been Antonioni's great project ever since he started out as a filmmaker after an extremely interesting career as a critic (like Godard). His early documentaries, such as *The People of the Po* (*Gente del Po*, 1947), and his earliest narrative films, such as the astonishing *Story of a Love Affair* (*Cronaca di un amore*, 1950), suggest an artist pulling against what he perceived as the constraints of neorealism towards an openness based on a heightened perception of constant change – a dynamic that was for him the fundamental quality of the post-war world.

A new question

For Antonioni, the issues of neorealism were essential, in that they gave him an aesthetic base from which to launch. *The People of the Po* is an early neorealist work, both in its submersion in unvarnished realism and its interest in the lives of working people, but it also works against the predominant tendency in neorealism to project sympathy and sentimentality. By the time of *Story of a Love Affair*, teeming with characters from the upper and middle classes, his was not a class-based cinema; it offered instead a broader perspective – observant, distanced, occasionally unsympathetic. It reached into a more modern realm than neorealism, a realm that had no name for it – and in fact still doesn't.

Antonioni was never a leader – nor even part – of a movement. That's partly because with each successive film he constantly redefined his approach. Roland Barthes, in his profoundly perceptive and concise 1980 speech honouring Antonioni, identified the process this way: "It is because you are an artist that your work is open to the Modern. Many people take the Modern to be a standard to be raised in battle against the old world and its compromised values; but for you the Modern is not the static term of a facile opposition; the Modern is on the contrary an active difficulty in following the changes of Time, not just at the level of grand History but at that of the little History of which each of us is individually the measure. Beginning in the aftermath of the last war, your work has thus proceeded, from moment to moment, in a movement of double vigilance, towards the contemporary world and towards yourself. Each of your films has been, at your personal level, a historical experience, that is to say the abandonment of an old problem and the formulation of a new question; this means that you have lived through and treated the history of the last 30 years with subtlety, not as the matter of an artistic reflection or an ideological mission, but as a substance whose magnetism it was your task to capture from work to work."



WOMAN IN THE FRAME
Vitti, above in 'L'eclisse', went on to star in many more films for Antonioni, continuing the female focus of his earlier works such as 'Le amiche'; top

L'avventura builds on the work and experiences of Antonioni's previous decade, which saw him working through his doubts about genre (film noir in *Story of a Love Affair*, backstage drama in *La signora senza camelie*, 1953); about narrative form (the counter-intuitive three-part structure of *I vinti*, 1952); his love of writer Cesare Pavese (author of the source novel for 1955's *Le amiche*)—as important a literary voice to Antonioni as Cesare Zavattini was to the hardcore neorealists. And add to this his growing interest in temporality, the emptied-out frame, the composition that maintains both precision and an expansive gaze that treats bodies, buildings and landscapes with equal importance.

With only a few filmmakers (Mizoguchi, Renoir, Dreyer, von Sternberg, Resnais, Olmi, Kubrick, and more recently Costa, Alonso and Apichatpong) is there such a visible, constant seeking of artistic purpose through the process of each successive film—a striving, a refinement. Antonioni's 1950s work represents one of the most fruitful directorial decades to watch of any filmmaker. Already in some ways a master in 1950, he proceeded to question his own positions with each film, as if the doubts he had about the state of the post-war world resided, originally, in himself, and then fanned out to the making of the work itself, so that the expression of mortality (most explicitly conveyed in a Pavese adaptation such as *Le amiche*) inside the film was part and parcel of the director's own tentative stance. (*Tentato suicidio*/Tentative Suicide is the title of Antonioni's segment in the 1953 omnibus film *L'amore in città*.)

These were not only cerebral matters—though the intellectual currents running underneath these films and under the neorealist movement preceding them were crucial to their fecundity—but real concerns rooted in the hard factors that faced any Italian filmmaker trying to get a project off the ground. Antonioni's tentativeness—a constant fascination to his supporters in the French critical community, and an irritation to many of his Italian contemporaries—was partly based on the tentativeness of Italian film production itself. In almost no case during the 1950s did he encounter a smooth pre-production, firm financial backing or drama-free production periods. The typically poor performance of his films at the box office did little to enamour him to distributors and producers, though in the then nascent world of the auteur film business, it helped enormously that his films did well—even smashingly well—in Paris.

After the commercial failure of *Il grido* (1957) and an initially limp critical response, Antonioni seriously considered abandoning the cinema altogether, and returned to the theatre, where he had

worked in the early years of his career. Even when he did come back to film, to shoot *L'avventura*, all of his worst concerns came back to haunt him. Already shaky producers bailed out mid-shoot as their company, Imeria, went bankrupt, leaving the crew literally high and dry on the desert island of Liscia Bianca, without sufficient food and water, in a hair-raising episode that makes Coppola's misadventures filming *Apocalypse Now* in the Filipino jungle sound like a stroll on the beach.

Surpassing mysteries

This context, in all its intellectual and practical dimensions, is crucial to comprehending the massive achievement that *L'avventura* represents. How a film of such constant perfection could even be made under such dreadful conditions is, for me, one of the surpassing mysteries of film history. Viewed in isolation (and aren't almost all films, even more now in our isolated viewing environments?), *L'avventura* can superficially be seen as magnificently beautiful in its constant chain of stunning black-and-white images from cinematographer Aldo Scavarda (with whom Antonioni had never previously worked, and never would again).

L'avventura is populated by good-looking actors oozing sex appeal. Monica Vitti, for one, had never had a starring film role before, but with her smouldering presence it was she—as much as Sophia Loren or Ingmar Bergman's ensemble of intelligent and worldly actresses—who set the standard and the look for the new, sexualised European movie star that was key to the successful foreign-film invasion that hit English-language shores (and was perceived as such a threat by LBJ and his White House crony Jack Valenti that they set up the American Film Institute as a nationalist bulwark against the foreigners supposedly taking over US cinemas). For New York downtown hipsters, London cosmopolitans and Paris cinephiles alike,

the combination of serious cinema and sexual beauty was simply too much to pass up.

All that may be why *L'avventura* had its immediate impact. (A special jury prize from Cannes, after all that booing and hissing, also didn't hurt.) But the endurance of the film, residing crucially in its conceptual openness, describes a pathway that cinema has been exploring and testing ever since. Much as Flaubert's novels and Beethoven's symphonies, concertos and string quartets are continually regenerated by way of the new directions they paved, and the new generations of work following such directions, so Antonioni's work—and *L'avventura* in particular—is regenerated by the subsequent cinema that came in its wake.

As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith observes in his essential study of the film, the periphery in Antonioni is of absolute importance, for this is where the sense of drift in his *mise en scène* and narratives resides—a de-centred centrality. No filmmaker before Antonioni, not even the most radical visionaries like Vigo, had established this before as a part of their aesthetic project. In the early scenes when Anna visits Sandro, or when they join their holiday boating group, Vitti's Claudia remains for a long time on the outside looking in, marginalised, seemingly unimportant. And yet there is something in her nervous gaze, her subtle physical gestures, that makes her impossible not to notice, especially in contrast to Anna's inner tension and outward unhappiness—an unhappiness she can't identify, even in private to Claudia.

These are most certainly not Bergman women, forever examining themselves, forever able to articulate the exact words in whole spoken paragraphs about their state of mind, their relationship with God. For one thing, in Antonioni, God doesn't exist. The state of the world is one of humans searching for some kind of connection amidst a disinterested nature; the island on which the floating party lands is both exotically remote and barren, like a volcano frozen during eruption. The landscapes in *L'avventura* have been interpreted in a number of different ways that testify to the film's Joycean levels of readings: from Seymour Chatman's insistence on metonyms for his reading of what he calls Antonioni's "surface of the world", to Gilberto Perez's more valuable view of the work in his extraordinary film study *The Material Ghost*, across a whole range of possible interpretations, from the literary to the visual. For me, however, it's always tempting to see these people—on this island, at that moment—as the last humans on earth.

In *L'avventura*, more than any film before it had ever dared, the centre will not hold. The open film is a fluid thing, pulsating, forever changing,



ACROSS THE CONTINENTS
The influence of Antonioni's film over a new generation of filmmakers stretches from Argentina – 'Liverpool'; top – to China – 'Still Life'; below

◀ shifting from one centre to another, not quite beginning and not quite ending (or at least beginning something new in its 'ending'). Anna, the centre, vanishes, with no visual or verbal clues to trace her by, except rumours of sightings. She was in effect the glue that held the party together, having helped bring Claudia in closer to her circle of friends – and to Sandro. But with Anna's disappearance, the film alters shape in front of us; a sudden absence actually expands the film's eye. Individual shots become more extended and prolonged, the sky and land grow larger, the elements become more tangible (clouds, rain, harsher sun).

Here and now

What's even more disturbing is that nothing happens – no discovery, no evidence, no detective work and, finally, no memory. *L'avventura* is, in part, the story of how a woman is forgotten, to the extent that long before the film is done, Anna is less than a trace on a page, a ghost or a photo in an album. A more sentimental filmmaker or a Hollywood studio would have ensured that Anna lived on through Claudia and Sandro's love affair and possible union. But here, after a while, they don't speak of Anna anymore. She gradually fades, which is what happens to the dead as regarded by the living (not that Anna is necessarily dead; the film neither encourages nor discourages the suggestion). Although their joint actions ostensibly trace an effort to collect any information on Anna's whereabouts, Antonioni suggests that the activity of Claudia and Sandro isn't nearly as important as their time together in this moment, in this or that place.

About those places. The greatness of *L'avventura* is multivalent, situated in many realms at once: cinematic, aural, existential, literary, architectural, sexual, philosophical – all of them of equal importance. The open film, beyond its fluidity, is amoral in the best sense, or at least unconcerned with a hierarchy of values. Almost all films of any kind privilege certain artistic values above others, and the great ones do it for several: *Singin' in the Rain* honours the body, the sounds of showbiz, the fresh memories of Hollywood at its height; *Vampyr* celebrates the psychological effect that optical dislocations have on the viewer's psyche, the spiritual possibilities of the horror film, the blurry line between genres and those alive and dead.

But *L'avventura* marks a new kind of film, not made before, in which the story that launched the film dissolves and gives way to something else – a journey? a wandering? – that points to a host of possible readings beyond what mere narrative allows, and yet at the same time is too specifically

rooted in a form of acting – in situations, episodes and events – to ever become purely abstract. (Though this was an area Antonioni did address in various ways, including the semi-apocalyptic ending of *L'eclisse*, the visualisations of madness in 1964's *Red Desert* and the slow-motion explosion near the end of *Zabriskie Point*.)

For Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "*L'avventura* is a film about consciousness and its objects, the consciousness that people have of other people and of the environment that surrounds them." It is a film that's also about a change of consciousness – what that looks and feels like: for instance Claudia's move from the edges to the centre and, in the final passages, back to the edges. This change of consciousness is realised in terms that encompass Antonioni's grasp of a vast range of materials: Sandro's relationship with architecture is framed with the couple's bodies, both above buildings and nearly swallowed up by them, their shared sexuality first shared in open space and then further and further contained within smaller rooms; the sense of new possibilities (new towns, new relationships) seen in the curve of a highway, a train hurtling down the tracks and through tunnels; the insistence on the Old World in the hulking presence of churches, formal dinner parties, rigid bodies against Claudia's free and easy one, always in motion; the sounds of creaky nostalgic 'Italian' music against Fusco's disturbing atonalities and unnerving syncopations (in one of the greatest film scores ever written).

Its influence can now be seen in films from every continent – the Antonioni 'open film' is in its golden age

Antonioni, as Perez often notes, infuses his cinema with doubt – a doubt that extends to his questioning of psychology as a basis for cinematic drama (let alone his doubt in the value of cinematic drama). But doubt is not an end point in this or his other films; instead it represents the beginning of new possibilities. Thus the open film's mapping of changes of consciousness – through the tools of *mise en scène*, temporality, elliptical editing, a matching of sound to image combined with a de-emphasis on actors' faces presiding over scenes (close-ups are fewer by far in *L'avventura* than any of his previous films) – is a picture of a post-psychological topography of the human condition, a radical effort to find a cinema grammar to express inner thought with photographic means.

This is a map that did (as Perez has noted) go out of style for a time, perhaps during the period of postmodernism, and definitely during the period when Fassbinder ruled the arthouse. But the map has been opened again by a new generation. Its influence can now be seen in films from every continent – to such an extent that the Antonioni open film can be said to be in its golden age. Here are some examples: the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, from *Blissfully Yours* to *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*; Lisandro Alonso's *La libertad* through to *Liverpool*; Uruphong Raksasad's *Agrarian Utopia*; C.W. Winter and Anders Edström's *The Anchorage*; Ulrich Köhler's *Sleeping Sickness*; the entire so-called Berlin School, of which Köhler is a part; Albert Serra's *Honour of the Knights* and *Birdsong*; James Benning; Kelly Reichardt; Kore-eda Hirokazu; Ho Yuhang's *Rain Dogs*; Jia Zhangke's *Platform* and *Still Life*; Li Hongqi's *Winter Vacation*. The list goes on...

Some of these filmmakers may disavow any Antonioni influence – but we know that what directors (including Antonioni) say about their films can't always be trusted. Besides, the ways in which *L'avventura* works on the viewer's consciousness are furtive and often below a conscious level. In Apichatpong's fascination with characters being transformed by the landscape around them; in Raksasad's interest in dissolving the borders between 'documentary' and 'fiction', or the recorded and the staged; in Alonso's precision and absolute commitment to purely cinematic resources and disgust with the sentimental; in Köhler's continual refinement of his visualisation of his characters' uncertain existences; in Reichardt's concern for what happens to human beings in nature – especially when they get lost: in all these and more, the open film is stretched, remoulded, reconsidered, questioned, embraced. A kind of film that was first named *L'avventura*.

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PH STILL, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

When the Japanese distributor Art Theatre Guild turned to production in the late 1960s, it unleashed a wave of extraordinary work from Japan's boldest filmmakers – Oshima, Imamura, Terayama and many more. **Alexander Jacoby** surveys the company's legacy

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Japanese independent feature film making seemed near extinct in 1959. Even the so-called *Nuberu Bagu* that emerged there the following year – named by analogy to the French *nouvelle vague* – was in fact the creation of Shochiku, the major studio that briefly sought to attract a new generation of viewers by sponsoring young directors to make cheap, innovative films. Though Shochiku gave the likes of Oshima Nagisa, Shinoda Masahiro and Yoshida Yoshishige the chance to launch their careers, those directors were denied the artistic autonomy enjoyed by their French counterparts, and were to part with the studio on bad terms.

Happily 1961 saw the establishment of a company that would have an incalculable positive impact on independent production in Japan. Art Theatre Guild, whose 50th anniversary is celebrated in a retrospective at BFI Southbank this month, didn't start life as a production company. Its initial aim was to distribute and exhibit foreign arthouse films in Japan. But from the late 1960s onwards, as Japan's once thriving studio system neared collapse, ATG was to become one of the country's few significant sources of creative filmmaking. Even though partial funding did

come from one of Japan's leading studios, Toho, ATG was largely free of the commercial constraints faced by the majors.

Challenging the norms of Japanese society, ATG's productions dared to examine controversial issues: the death penalty (and the status of resident Koreans) in Oshima's *Death by Hanging* (*Koshikei*, 1968); transgressive sexuality, including incest in Terayama Shuji's *Pastoral Hide and Seek* (*Den'en ni shisu*, 1974) and homosexuality in Matsumoto Toshio's *Funeral Parade of Roses* (*Bara no soretsu*, 1968); the legacy of the samurai ethos in the same director's *Pandemonium* (*Shura*, 1971); and the enduring and bitter memories of the Pacific War in Okamoto Kihachi's *Human Bullet* (*Nikudan*, 1968).

During these years, ATG sustained the careers of some of Japan's most distinguished filmmakers, enabling the likes of Oshima, Shinoda, Matsumoto and Terayama to craft their most profound films, while commercial directors such as Okamoto and Nakagawa Nobuo were given the opportunity to create their most personal. In addition, it helped establish younger filmmakers such as Kazuyuki Izutsu, Yoshimitsu Morita and Kichitaro Negishi who, after securing ATG funding for early features, went on to commercial success and popularity.

ATG was above all the brainchild of Kawakita

Kashiko (1908-93), one of the central figures in establishing cinematic links between Japan and the West. (With her husband Nagamasa, she had run the Towa Import Company, in pre-war days the major importer of European films to Japan, while from the 1970s to the 1990s, the Kawakitas' Japan Film Library Council was to be a significant force in arranging retrospectives of Japanese films abroad.) Troubled by the lack of distribution for foreign arthouse movies in Japan at the start of the 1960s, the Kawakitas established Art Theatre Guild in 1961 with the assistance of Iwao Mori, a film critic and senior executive at one of Japan's major studios, Toho. Acquiring a chain of cinemas in major cities from Sapporo to Fukuoka – including their Tokyo flagship, the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka – they embarked on an ambitious screening programme. While 's ATG's initial focus was on foreign art movies (their first release, in the spring of 1962, was a classic of the Polish New Wave, Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels*), they also quickly began to distribute the works of independent Japanese filmmakers.

Thus in 1962 the company distributed a stunning feature debut, Teshigahara Hiroshi's *Pitfall* (*Otoshiana*), which – though not financed by ATG – displayed many characteristics of the company's



PARADE OF MARVELS
Facing page, from top left: 'Double Suicide' (1969),
'Pastoral Hide and Seek' (1974), 'Funeral Parade of
Roses' (1968), 'Human Bullet' (1968)

later productions. An existential reworking of the traditional ghost story, or *kaidan*, it evoked both Japanese and European models: the US critic Dan Harper has pointed to the film's thematic similarities to Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960), while Vernon Young, reviewing the film at the time of its release in the West, evoked Resnais and Kafka, yet went on to ask: "What is more Japanese than a palpable ghost?" Significantly, too, Teshigahara's aesthetic activities were not confined to the cinema; he was also a leading practitioner of *ikebana* (flower arranging), a painter, designer and stage director. The blend of Japanese and foreign modes, and the quest to make films with a conscious awareness and experience of other art forms, came to typify ATG's approach.

Through the mid-1960s, ATG continued to act as a distributor—to the benefit of another promising first-time director, Kuroki Kazuo. His *Silence Has No Wings* (*Tobenai chinmoku*, 1967) is a dazzling fable that uses the premise of a boy catching a butterfly as the jumping-off point for a mysterious, meditative exploration of Japanese society

and recent history. Kuroki's films in the 1970s would all be produced by ATG.

By 1967, ATG had taken a decisive step into production. Nikkatsu director Imamura Shohei—a New Wave filmmaker in spirit, though not a member of the original *Nuberu Bagu*—received funding from ATG to complete his eccentric mock-documentary *A Man Vanishes* (*Ningen johatsu*). From 1968, the company began a start-to-finish involvement in film production. Projects were chosen by a committee of critics, with an eye to a project's aesthetic merit rather than its commercial potential; budgets were low, at approximately 10 million yen (then the equivalent of \$28,000—though in practice, costs usually rose above this), shared between ATG and the director's company.

The first fruit of this new venture was Oshima's *Death by Hanging*. The director had left Shochiku as early as 1960, in frustration at their interference with his work and the politically motivated censorship of his *Night and Fog in Japan* (*Nihon no yoru to kiri*), which was withdrawn abruptly following the assassination of the leader of Japan's Socialist Party by a right-wing fanatic. Oshima's subsequent efforts at independent production had been only partially successful. But with *Death by Hanging*, he created the first of his run of master-



works. What begins as a sober account of the continuing use of the death penalty in Japan, develops into a near-surreal modernist narrative when a condemned man survives execution. Resuscitated, but with no memory of his crime, the protagonist is compelled by his captors to re-enact hypothetical scenes from his life leading up to the murder he committed, in the hope that he will be persuaded to acknowledge his guilt.

Through this blackly comic approach, Oshima not only exposes the cruelty of the death penalty, but also tackles another controversial issue in post-war Japan—discrimination against its ethnic Korean minority, from whose ranks the criminal hails. Chilling and witty, politically acute and stylistically adventurous, Oshima's film typifies the power and imagination of ATG's work at its best. He went on to produce further high quality works for the organisation, including *Boy* (*Shonen*, 1969) and *The Ceremony* (*Gishiki*, 1971), both subtle yet scathing chronicles of modern Japan.

At the end of the 1960s Shinoda Masahiro, a colleague of Oshima's from his Shochiku days, came to ATG to make one of his finest films, *Double Suicide* (*Shinju ten no amijima*, 1969), a retelling of a classic *bunraku* (puppet-theatre) narrative about an adulterous affair that culminates in suicide. ➡

◀ Shinoda retold this traditional story in decidedly avant-garde style, casting the same actress – his wife Iwashita Shima – in two roles as the protagonist's wife and lover, and using the fragile and movable boundaries of traditional Japanese architecture to create a world of permeable spaces where privacy is unobtainable.

This practice of reworking traditional narratives in modernist fashion was characteristic of ATG. The avant-garde filmmaker Matsumoto Toshio, after directing numerous shorts, turned not to a Japanese narrative but to Greek myth for his feature debut *Funeral Parade of Roses*. This extraordinary film retells the Oedipus legend in the setting of Tokyo's gay district of Shinjuku Ni-Chome, placing the original's tale of sexual transgression in the context of the liberalisation of sexual mores at the time.

Idiosyncratic visions

Can an overall ATG style be defined? To a degree, it's futile to try, since the company served as a space where Japan's most intransigent auteurs could develop their most idiosyncratic visions. But there are continuities all the same. In terms of generics, ATG films often advertised their own artificiality, importing techniques from theatre and documentary, narrative elements from myth and religion, and concepts from film theory in a distinctively modernist pot-pourri. In terms of content, ATG directors explicitly tackled the political uncertainties of a country torn between corporate power and leftist activism, and divided over its status as the main Cold War ally of the United States in East Asia. A stress on transgressive sexuality is visible not only in films by Oshima, Shinoda and Terayama, who showed a broader concern with the sexual throughout their careers, but in Hani Susumu's *The Inferno of First Love* (*Hatsukoi jigokuhen*, 1968), which departs from the director's usual semi-documentary style and understated realism to create an uncharacteristically baroque, sexually explicit and emotionally intense melodrama.

Of course, ATG was not unique in its treatment of sexually explicit themes. One of Japan's major studios, Nikkatsu, was to switch production almost exclusively to soft pornography (the so-called 'Roman Porno') in 1971; and the low-budget, independently made, sexually explicit genre of 'pink' cinema came to prominence around the same time as ATG. Indeed, despite its highbrow credentials, ATG was in some ways indebted to this trend. The leading director of 'pink', Wakamatsu

ATG served as a space where Japan's most intransigent auteurs could develop their idiosyncratic visions

Koji, had professional links with Oshima, and Wakamatsu's colleague Adachi Masao had actually appeared in *Death by Hanging*; thus, as critic Hirasawa Go has written, "it is easy to imagine the great influence of the low-budget and short shoots of Wakamatsu Production's pink films on ATG's 10 million yen film projects."

Indeed, Wakamatsu's 'pink' films contain explicit political commentary in addition to explicit sex, while his ATG film *Ecstasy of the Angels* (*Tenshi no kokotsu*, 1972) is not radically different in tone and style from the best of his erotic movies. Nevertheless, ATG arguably explored the links between sex and politics with greater precision and poise than even the best 'pink' films. Works such as *Funeral Parade of Roses* and *Pastoral Hide and Seek* were among the Japanese cinema's most convincing demonstrations of Carol Hanisch's radical slogan, "The personal is political."

As well as addressing the politics of the present, the company also explored the heritage of the past, producing a series of subversive reworkings of the *jidai-geki* or period-film genre. With his second feature *Pandemonium* (*Shura*, 1971), Matsumoto turned to one of the great legends of Japanese history, the tale of the loyal 47 ronin, or masterless samurai, who in the early 18th century conspired to avenge the death of their former lord. Long a popular subject for *kabuki* and *bunraku* plays, this story became the most filmed narrative in Japanese cinema, with most of the treatments endorsing the heroism of the protagonists and their devotion to the memory of their lord.

Matsumoto, however, produced a scathingly subversive film; rather than focus on the main action, *Pandemonium* chronicles a sordid story of revenge revolving around a samurai defrauded of the money he needs to participate in the feud. For the critic Noël Burch, the film evokes both Brecht and Elizabethan tragedy in its intense yet sardonic

COMING OF AGE

From distributing distinctive debuts such as 'Pitfall', left, ATG graduated to producing such equally complex works as 'This Transient Life', right

drama; and like the Brecht of *Mother Courage*, it unsparingly strips the veneer of heroism from a series of horrifying events. Three years later, with *The Assassination of Ryoma* (*Ryoma ansatsu*), Kuroki Kazuo produced a similarly iconoclastic account of the events leading up to the death of a revered 19th-century pro-democracy statesman.

In addition to tackling historical themes, ATG also explored the dogma of Japan's traditional religions. Thus, with the complex and visually stunning *This Transient Life* (*Mujo*, 1970), Jissoji Akio – who like Kuroki would become one of the company's leading directors – crafted a meditation on Buddhism, showing how a modernist style could illuminate an ancient creed.

Although ATG's finest achievements came in the years between 1968 and 1975, the company continued to produce films well into the 1980s, and to distribute until the early 1990s. It played a significant role in developing the careers of new directors such as Izutsu Kazuyuki and Morita Yoshimitsu, who both worked in erotic cinema before being given the opportunity to realise their first truly personal films for ATG. The former's *Empire of Kids* (*Gaki teikoku*, 1981) and the latter's *The Family Game* (*Kazoku gemu*, 1983) heralded flourishing careers in popular cinema, with Izutsu's *Pachigiri!* (2005) and Morita's *Lost Paradise* (1997) coming to rank among the most commercially successful of modern Japanese films.

Perhaps there's an irony in the fact that a company that strove to promote alternative visions ended up providing support for young directors who would go on to enjoy such resolutely commercial careers. Yet even in its heyday, when ATG was at its most experimental, its work was rarely inaccessible. The formal ingenuity, intellectual complexity and emotional intensity of the company's best films are arguably unsurpassed in Japanese cinema; but if those films sometimes require a knowledge of particular social, cultural and political contexts in order to be fully understood, their visual beauty and imagination remain enthralling for any engaged spectator. The output of the Art Theatre Guild ranks among the undoubted treasures of Japanese cinema.

■ A season of ATG films plays throughout August at BFI Southbank, London. Another season, 'Theatre Scorpio: Japanese Independent And Experimental Cinema of the 1960s', runs from 12-31 July at the Bethnal Green Working Men's Club, London. 'A Man Vanishes' will be released on DVD in November

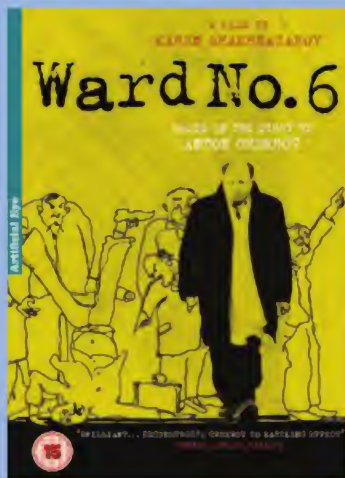


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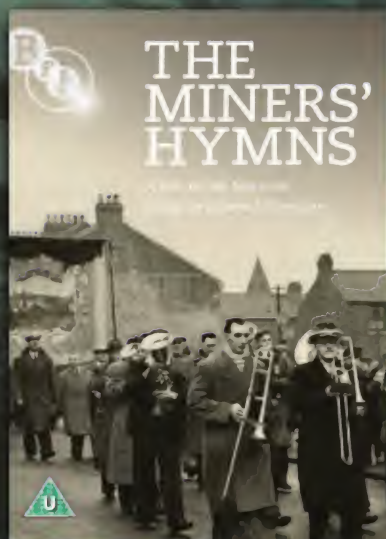
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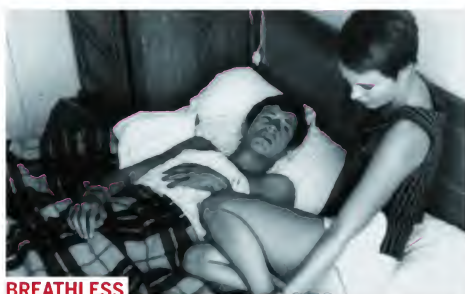
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More than half a century after 'Breathless' first catapulted him on to the world stage, Jean-Luc Godard is still challenging cinematic norms with his politically charged, poetic essay 'Film Socialisme'. **Gabe Klinger** jump-cuts through key moments in the director's life

THE OLD SOLDIER



BREATHLESS

18 June 2010

An elder statesman of far-left cinema, 79-year-old Jean-Luc Godard appears at the Cinéma des Cinéastes in Paris to do a Q&A after a screening of his latest work, *Film Socialisme*. The filmmaker is puffing away at a cigar, and moderator Edwy Plenel warns those of us in attendance, "Even though Mr Godard can smoke, you cannot." It's a small detail, but one that reminds the audience that Godard hails from another era. *Nouvelle vague* luminaries Luc Moullet, Agnès Varda and Jean Douchet are present. The reverence in the room is high. A long time ago, the men in the cinema would have removed their caps.

Godard's films, like the individual, occupy an enduring place in the discussion of cinema in the last half-century. *Breathless* (*A bout de souffle*, 1960), the film that catapulted the director on to the world stage, celebrated its 50th anniversary on the eve of *Film Socialisme's* unveiling. If one didn't know Godard's vast filmography, encountering



FILM SOCIALISME

the new film would not lead one to the conclusion that it was the work of a septuagenarian. *Film Socialisme* is an unconventional essay-narrative-poem that plays boldly with digital aesthetics, and on this particular evening Godard is animated as he discusses it. He honours audience questions for nearly two hours, makes jokes... [The full video of this conversation is easily found online.]

Roughly a month earlier, at the world premiere of *Film Socialisme* in Cannes, the filmmaker had declined to attend, cheekily citing "problems of the Greek type" as justification. A frustrated press corps took this personally, conflating the perceived above-it-all attitude of *Film Socialisme* with that of the author himself. In Paris, though, Godard proves the opposite: he's discursive, vulnerable and never taunting or condescending to the eager listeners in the cinema.

Outside the hostile context of Cannes, where hasty evaluation takes precedence over thoughtful analysis, the film reveals the same generosity of



JEAN-LUC GODARD



AGNES VARDA



LE PETIT SOLDAT



NIGHT AND FOG

LEFT: POSTERS AND DESIGNS (JACOBBS) (O)

spirit and openness for debate. Godard's dense assembly of history in *Film Socialisme* – encompassing everything from the Bronze Age to the Spanish Civil War to the current economic crisis – is not to be unpacked without some work. (For a full appraisal and synopsis, see Brad Stevens's review on page 66.) Indeed, for those not versed in Godard's disjointed style of cinema, in the essay-film genre as exemplified by filmmakers such as Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Jean-Daniel Pollet and Varda, or in the grand arc of 20th-century geopolitics, *Film Socialisme* may appear inscrutable.

3 September 1950

Barely known, 19-year-old cine-club regular Jean-Luc Godard pens an article for the *Gazette du cinéma* titled "Towards a Political Cinema". It's the earliest evidence of his fixation with politics vis-à-vis film. In the piece, Godard sorts through his feelings having just viewed a scene from a Gaumont newsreel on a May Day rally. Watching this brief

fragment, he understands the potential of a propagandistic film language, capable of seductively thrusting the beautiful bodies of young German communists through time and space in the name of a larger cause. It's an enigmatic piece (not uncommonly for Godard at this early stage of his career) and one that ends by pointing a finger at "unhappy filmmakers of France" for not making issue-oriented films, as if to dare them.

Unlike his contemporaries Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer, who were never as explicitly political in their own critical work for the *Gazette* (and later for *Cahiers du cinéma*), Godard gradually revealed from that point on a vigorous engagement with the issues of the day, from the Algerian War in his second feature *Le Petit soldat* (1960) to Vietnam in a number of films at the end of the 1960s. Godard would go on to say in an interview, "The *nouvelle vague* is accused of showing nothing but people in bed" – an indictment that could extend to the author himself; the longest scene in *Breathless*

depicts its two leads arguing in bed. However, the filmmaker went on to assure us, "My characters will be active in politics and have no time for bed."

26 April 1956

Night and Fog (*Nuit et brouillard*, 1955), one of the first analytical films on the horrors of the Nazi death camps, is announced for Cannes. It's a pivotal moment in the evolution of the essay film as a subgenre. Resnais, the director, lends aesthetic rigour to a subject of meteoric importance, once again confirming the lofty position of cinema as a tool for the dissemination of documented history.

Unlike documentaries before it, *Night and Fog* is an assemblage of found footage from the war and present-day material shot by a professional crew; in addition, novelist Jean Cayrol, a survivor of the Shoah, is involved as screenwriter, affording the film its passionately motivated agenda: history must not repeat itself. By the time Godard embarks on *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989-98), ➡

Jean-Luc Godard Film Socialisme

an eight-part culmination of his preoccupations with the history of art and world politics and their intertwined relationship with cinema, he has fully internalised Resnais and Cayrol's gesture and laments the present day's capacity for cultural amnesia. Making the spectator complicit, Godard declares, "You saw nothing at Hiroshima... at Sarajevo" – thus bringing 20th-century history full circle.

In a two-minute *tour de force* deconstructing a single photograph from the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina entitled *Je vous salue, Sarajevo* (1993), Godard narrates a poetic voiceover that offers a condensed formulation of his main preoccupations. "There's a rule, and an exception," he informs us. "Everybody speaks the rule: cigarette, computer, T-shirt, television, tourism, war. Nobody speaks the exception. It isn't spoken, it's written: Flaubert, Dostoevsky. It's composed: Gershwin, Mozart. It's painted: Cézanne, Vermeer. It's filmed: Antonioni, Vigo."

In *Film Socialisme*, "the rule" is the subject of the film's first part: a giant tourist cruise liner with a trajectory beginning in the cradle of civilisation (Egypt, Israel, Palestine), continuing into Europe (Greece, Italy, Spain), with an odd excursion through the Black Sea (Ukraine). The various characters intersect in gyms, casinos, dining rooms, nightclubs, tacky art galleries and even something like a makeshift Christian prayer room adjacent to slot machines. Evidently for Godard, "the rule" is the detritus left as mankind unthinkingly consumes each landscape it disembarks on.

The depressing reality of the cruise is sharply contrasted with "the exception": brief glimpses of humanity's glories (and some of its follies), represented mainly through film clips, paintings, classical music and passages from literature – the core materials of Godard's densely layered video essays starting in the mid-1970s. Godard's assortment of formats amounts to a satisfying whole: none of the three parts of *Film Socialisme* isolates a particular stylistic device in favour of another. The narrative in Godard is fully complemented by essayistic digressions; where literature had embraced such modernist complexity in the likes of Joyce and Beckett, earlier 20th-century cinema had not. *Film Socialisme*, interestingly, arrives at the intersection of the maturing film-essay format and the transformation of our visual culture through the new digital means of communication.

14 June 1905

A date of paramount relevance in *Film Socialisme*: the start of the mutiny aboard Imperial Russia's Potemkin battleship. This incident forms the basis of Eisenstein's fictionalised *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which Godard amply samples in *Film Socialisme* (as he had before in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*). The concept of a dramatic recreation building upon, distorting or substituting the memory of a real event is not of particular interest in itself. According to art critic Harold Rosenberg, who was cited by Godard in his 1950 article, it's the manifestation of the consciousness of self that reveals how artists engage "in the drama of history through the spontaneous and passionate poetry of the events". This might help to explain why the *action* on the Odessa Steps, as visualised by



HISTOIRE(S) DU CINEMA



FILM SOCIALISME



THE LAST BOLSHEVIK



FILM SOCIALISME



BATTLESHIP POTESKIN



FILM SOCIALISME

Eisenstein, is better known – and more methodically studied – than anything that actually happened in the moments after the sailors aboard the real Potemkin rebelled. This, ultimately, is a Bazinian ideal of cinema come to fruition, one that Godard repeatedly attempts to demystify in his video essays.

However, Godard is also taking a cue from an earlier example of the essay film, Chris Marker's *The Last Bolshevik* (1993). In a film that examines the history of the Soviet Union through its propaganda machinery (anchored by the life of filmmaker Alexandr Medvedkin), Marker offers a memorable sequence in which he measures the physical length of the Odessa Steps, remarking that it would take a few short minutes to descend them in real life; Eisenstein manages to extend the action considerably – and to great dramatic effect – in *Battleship Potemkin*'s most celebrated sequence. Again, it's not a particularly revelatory observation. But a savvy essayist like Marker knows that to emphasise such a detail will take the viewer from a passive into an active viewing mode, where every subsequent image may be scrutinised for its manipulative placement.

Godard – like Marker – does not wish to manipulate the viewer, instead presenting every scene, every historical detail as if it were a splinter to be added into a larger body. This patchy style attempts to approximate historical memory as a shattered mirror. Remarkably, Godard sees an aesthetic potential in the poetic grandeur of this impressionistic concept. While his political stances may at times appear well worn in their didactic effect, his presentation is anything but academic. His detractors, however, see *Film Socialisme* as frustratingly cryptic.

29 October 1963

Assertion is not Godard's strong suit. His films may be stylistically confident, but they highlight ambiguity and champion individual freedom over the interest of states. ("The dream of the state is to be one. The dream of the individual is to be two," is one slogan presented in *Film Socialisme*.) After three years of censorship woes owing to a controversial torture scene, *Le Petit soldat* – his first feature after *Breathless*, and his first immersion into the political arena – finally enters Parisian cinema in the autumn of 1963. (Godard has shot another four features in the interim.)

In the film Godard creates one of his most complex characters, Bruno Forestier (Michel Subor), a right-wing French terror agent caught up in the struggles of the Algerian War, who ruminates his doubts in voiceover and acts in a paradoxical, not always implicitly self-serving manner. In *Cahiers du cinéma*, critic Jean-Louis Comolli sharply observed: "Forestier, in order to find himself, must keep trying to escape from the ready-made solutions and constraints of his 'friends' as well as his 'enemies', from the warring parties, the contradictions that surround him... So if the little soldier seems to be alone in a purely personal combat, spectators, in defining themselves vis-à-vis a party, a point of view or a political stance, are putting themselves on the same level as the terrorists in the film... Supreme irony of *mise en scène*, to render on the judge his own verdict."

Godard's political stances may seem well worn, but his presentation is anything but

Carrying a part of Forestier within him, Godard never dares to be persuasive on purely political terms. In *Film Socialisme*, the words "State of Palestine" in Arabic are superimposed over the word "Palestine" in Hebrew. This title appears as a cryptogram to those who speak neither language – and yet, decoded, it's almost unbelievably simple in its didactic value.

September 1970

Finally, is it possible to discern a political bias in Godard? A number of events often overlooked by commentators who would prefer to see Godard as an armchair radical or a grumpy anti-Zionist (on this score, Godard's interview personality is more problematic than the work itself) make it difficult to reach a conclusion.

Contacted by the Arab League via Hany Jawhariyya – the official filmmaker of Arafat's Fatah party – Godard, co-director Jean-Pierre Gorin and cinematographer Armand Marco had set off in 1969 on a project to make a film in Palestinian camps in Jordan, the West Bank and Lebanon. Godard had jumped head first into political filmmaking with the Dziga-Vertov collective, which aimed to redefine the method by which political films were made and distributed. The Arab League's proposal had taken the three filmmakers decidedly out of their comfort zones. Spending close to nine months travelling through the Middle East, Godard, Gorin and Marco had accumulated 40 hours of rushes and, by the end of August 1970, were prepared to begin editing their most ambitious effort to date.

And then the events of Black September happened: a spate of hijackings, followed by the Jordanian government's savage crackdown on Palestinian organisations.

Godard and Gorin were already deeply conflicted as a result of a problematic shoot. They had found their overall design for the project, provisionally titled *Until Victory*, thwarted by various location circumstances, the most troublesome being translation problems (neither filmmaker spoke Arabic) and cultural differences (women teaching themselves to read and write in the camps refused to let the crew film them, much to the bafflement of Godard and Gorin).

Antoine de Baecque, author of the recently published *Godard: biographie*, documents the comically short interview that Godard attempted with Yasser Arafat. Apparently, he only managed to ask two questions before the peeved leader told him to "come back tomorrow" (a second meeting never materialised). Godard's questions to Arafat are revealing of the filmmaker's multidimensional understanding of history, endeavouring to join the



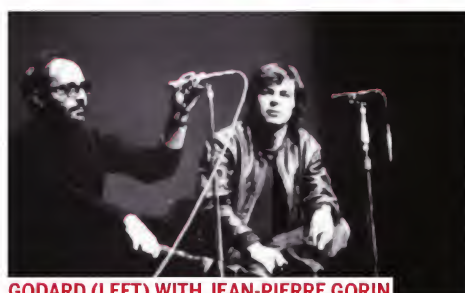
FILM SOCIALISME



YASSER ARAFAT



FILM SOCIALISME



GODARD (LEFT) WITH JEAN-PIERRE GORIN



FILM SOCIALISME



NOAM CHOMSKY

dots philosophically between the Palestinian struggle in the 1960s and 70s, and the Jewish struggle during World War II.

"I asked him if the origins of the Palestinians' difficulties had something to do with the concentration camps," Godard reported. "[Arafat] said to me, 'No, that's their story, the Germans and the Jews.' And I said, 'Not exactly, you know that in the camps, when a Jewish prisoner was very weak, close to death, they called him *Muslim* [musulman].'" And he responded, "So?" I said, "You know, they could have called them black or an entirely different name, but no, they said *Muslim*, and that shows that there is a relationship, a direct relationship between the Palestinians' difficulties and the concentration camps." Godard proceeded with a more conventional line of questioning before Arafat curtailed the discussion. (I offer this anecdote in its entirety as some corroboration that hysterical accusations of Godard being anti-Semitic are misguided, especially in relationship to the nuanced Israeli-Palestinian situation as it's presented in *Film Socialisme*.)

These occurrences couldn't help but fuel a growing ambivalence on the part of Godard and Gorin. To paraphrase de Baecque, was *Until Victory* to be a work of mere propaganda, or an informed critique of the methods of the Palestinian resistance?

But by mid-September 1970, a great number of the people filmed by Godard, Gorin and Marco have been massacred, imprisoned or dispersed by King Hussein's army in an effort to expunge the Palestinian liberation movement from Jordan. The filmmakers' wish to show the first cut of the film to the subjects is now a tragic afterthought.

Throughout the month of September, Godard and Gorin remain barricaded in their editing suite for fear that they may be the targets of Mossad, Zionist militants or the Jordanian secret service. These circumstances shake Godard to his core. The dissolution of the Dziga-Vertov group becomes inevitable. (Later, in 1976, the material from *Until Victory* will be reshaped with help from Anne-Marie Miéville into *Ici et ailleurs*, one of Godard's best and one of the most astounding essay films ever made.)

17 May 2010

Film Socialisme premieres in Cannes. When Godard's cruise liner attempts to dock in Palestine, the words "ACCESS DENIED" flash on the screen. A day earlier, activist Noam Chomsky, a Kibbutz member at Israel's infancy, has been barred entry to Israel. Small coincidence, big irony.

In the year since then, the Arab Spring has happened, Spain has joined Greece as a beleaguered economy, the Italian government has been facing increasing scrutiny, and France has banned the wearing of burkas (among other alarming trends in the Right). *Film Socialisme's* tableau expands every day, Godard's shattered mirror reassembling triumphantly, and lastingly, in the mind of whoever is willing to look and listen – and to engage.

■ *Film Socialisme* is released on 8 July, and is reviewed on page 66

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A FILM BY JEAN-LUC GODARD

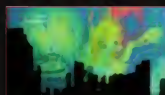
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Jason Solomons, THE OBSERVER, (Cannes 2010)



"At 80, legendary French director and iconoclast Jean-Luc Godard has produced one of his most obscure, humorous and intoxicating films."

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.....
The Tree of Life seems already to be a film
that's more interesting to argue about than
to actually watch. It's difficult to shake the
sense of it as the spectacle of a man gone
deep-sea diving in his own navel **p79**
.....

Men out of step

'Treacle Jr.' is only the third film Jamie Thraves has managed to get made in over a decade, but it confirms him as a British filmmaker with a distinctive comic touch and a sympathy for oddball outsiders, says **Trevor Johnston**

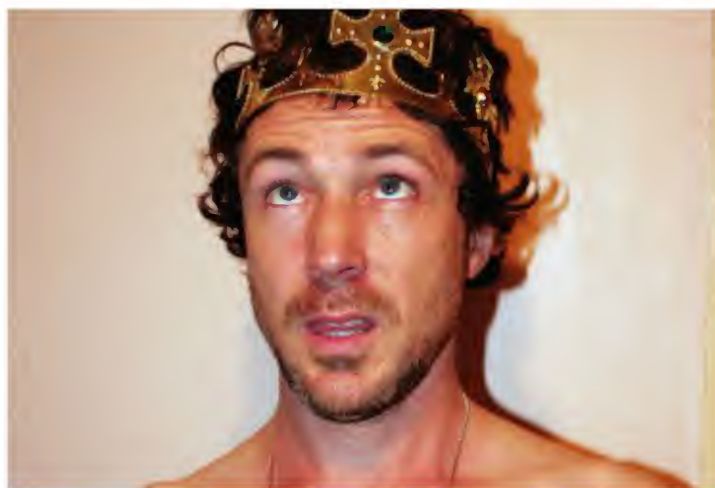
Treacle Jr.

Jamie Thraves, 2010

Here's what you'd call genuine independent cinema. Writer-director Jamie Thraves remortgaged his house and persuaded his sister and brother-in-law to co-fund this endearing South London comedy-drama. No Channel 4, no BBC, no distribution pre-sales, just do it. So Thraves gets the freedom to put together the hang-loose film he wants to make, without having producers trying to second-guess its commercial prospects, yet does so at the cost of a certain personal financial stress. At which point, it's imperative to point out that *Treacle Jr.* is certainly no esoteric indulgence, but a funny/sad story of odd-couple social misfits that has evident audience appeal.

In fact, given its presumably modest budgetary requirements, it's hard to see quite why Thraves had to go the solo route to get it made at all, especially when you cut back to 2000, when a hot young filmmaker off the back of terrific shorts and award-winning music videos turned out *The Low Down*, a twentysomething slice-of-life that looks now – as it looked then – like one of the defining British films of its era. What's happened between then and now speaks volumes about the UK film industry's relationship with filmmakers who don't quite fit the usual boxes – yet also perhaps about Thraves's own sensibility and how it works with the challenges of feature narrative.

One thing that's abundantly clear from *Treacle Jr.* is that Thraves is a filmmaker with an abiding set of preoccupations, who puts a personal stamp on all his work. It's crisis-of-masculinity stuff, in a way, focusing on men uneasy with the demands of domestic responsibility, or even social identity as such. In *The Low Down* Aidan Gillen's commitment-averse prop-maker Frank bristles at being judged by others with the dread question: "So what do you do?" In Thraves's barely released 2008 Patricia Highsmith adaptation *The Cry of the Owl*, a post-breakdown Paddy Considine



While Aidan talks an absolute pile of shite, his fearlessness, generosity, optimism and flashes of self-knowledge make an impact on Tom

finds his greatest happiness at one remove from others, when he's spying unseen on Julia Stiles pottering around her isolated house. This time, the very briefest rendering of suburban husband and father Tom (Tom Fisher) at home with wife, baby, piano and patio doors proves, in the Thravesian universe, enough to have us understanding why he gets the train to London, throws away his phone and credit cards, then starts again – this time on a park bench with a carry-out.

There's scant sentiment or sense of liberation about where this gets

Tom, however. Thraves can't help but offer us elegantly framed images of London parks, yet the threat of violence is there. Losing his cash leaves Tom begging for spare change, seeing what used to be his middle-class world from the outside looking in. Not that the film's some social-conscience heart-tugger; instead it's more concerned with the catalytic process that might turn the fugitive Tom around and allow him to work through his fears and insecurities.

Enter Aidan (Aidan Gillen), the sort of over-friendly, socially maladjusted loudmouth any one

of us would happily cross the street to avoid. The contrast with the lanky, languorous, softly spoken Tom could hardly be more acute, as the mercurial, nonsense-spewing Aidan sticks limpet-like to his new best friend. "Am I annoying you? 'Cause you can tell me if I am," he says in a voice spraying Donald Duck sibilants. Aidan knows he's a pain in the arse, but he's so indefatigable with it that even Tom eventually comes to appreciate the kindness and vulnerability lurking behind an eminently throttlable exterior. Gillen's characterisation here is light years away from the reserve he showed in *The Low Down* – a mark of what a gifted (and underused) screen actor he is.

All this plants us in *Midnight Cowboy* or *Fisher King* terrain, where the protagonist is saved by a foil who looks to be his social polar opposite – a familiar outline that allows Thraves to get some shape into his screenplay. If you're going to put insecure and hesitant characters centre stage, as Thraves likes to do, the process of dramatic development, ebb and flow, becomes something of a challenge, since a passive protagonist can lose the audience's sympathy or just bring the story to a stop. Back in *The Low Down*, Thraves's resourceful solution was to have friends and work colleagues amplify the questions of maturity and responsibility at the heart of the story, but with the long-gestating and intriguing-yet-flawed *The Cry of the Owl*, the serio-comic social portraiture of faux pas-prone Considine proved an uneasy fit with the demands of the murder-themed plotline.

Again with *Treacle Jr.* – titled after Aidan's pet kitten, thus flagging up the nurturing element of the material – the dynamic between the two men works a treat, yet the story beats are often wobbly, to say the least. While Aidan talks an absolute pile of shite, his fearlessness, generosity, optimism and flashes of self-knowledge cumulatively make an impact on Tom, driving the story along to a touching if somewhat over-telegraphed conclusion. Getting to that point, however, involves a surfeit of coincidence and the





ODD COUPLE

Arriving in London after walking out on his wife and baby, Tom (Tom Fisher, left) finds himself caught up with the unpredictable Aidan (Aidan Gillen, right), and unable to drag himself away

machinations of Linda (Riann Steele), a street-hardened hustler who's handy with the mitts and allergic to cats, but remains a far sketchier presence than the men. Moreover, when Thraves replays key lines of dialogue over the story's coda in a bid to underline its emotional impact, you're definitely left with the sense of a filmmaker who knows his big finale needs a bit of help to sustain its would-be warm glow.

The real strength of *Treacle Jr.*, however, lies in what's going on between Tom and Aidan – the character moments of disdain and realisation, tension and acknowledgement. Going right back to his videos for Radiohead ('Just', 1995) and Coldplay ('The Scientist', 2002; 'God Put a Smile upon Your Face', 2003), it's clear that Thraves has always had a thing about men out of step with the society around them – something he's successfully allied to a remarkable knack for making the milieu of a story seem an essential part of its emotional fabric. For

sunny, ungentrified Dalston and dark, woody Canada in his first two films, read South-East London here, as Thraves discovers greenery and interesting churches to suggest a lifting of the spirits amidst the prevailing urban grunge. The profile that emerges from his three films over the last 11 years is of a naturally gifted observer – of the micro-detail of social interaction, of the way places and spaces affect us – to whom extended storytelling doesn't yet come quite as easily.

The fact there have only been three films in that time – one of which Thraves partly paid for out of his own pocket – in the end tells its own story, which basically boils down to this: an industry always on the lookout for the hot new indie talent – until their first film underperforms at the box office, from which point they're out on their own. Perhaps it will ever be thus. Sure, *Treacle Jr.* has its glitches, but it's a lovely film, tender and funny, with a splendidly judged performance from Aidan Gillen, and so much more craft than the usual low-fi, handheld murkfest. It reaffirms that Jamie Thraves really is a special talent. But if you want to see his next film, make sure you catch this one. Simple as that. For credits and synopsis, see page 78

Starting over

Jamie Thraves on the inspiration for his third film *'Treacle Jr.'*

I wanted to make a film that featured an extremely optimistic character. Aidan Gillen plays Aidan and Tom Fisher plays Tom – keeping their true names somehow helped root their characters in reality for me. I always saw Aidan pretty much smiling all the way through the story, even when he's getting beaten up. That was the image that really drove me to make this – this sweet, childlike man grinning as he's being hit, blood all over his face.

I had the idea to pitch Aidan against this extremely depressed guy, Tom. I felt a lot of gentle comedy could come from this set-up, but I wanted the comedy to come from very real situations. I was going for 'Midnight Cowboy' or 'Withnail and I', although someone recently told me the relationship reminded them of Donkey and Shrek!

When writing the script I tried to explain exactly what's up with Tom – why a seemingly happy man could walk out on his wife and baby. Every time I attempted to explain his motives, it always felt unnecessary and clunky, so I decided to leave it to the audience to work out why – to allow people to project. Tom is a kind of tabula rasa – the blank-slate narrator. Most people tend to



JAMIE THRAVES

find Aidan annoying when they first encounter him, just as Tom does, but they slowly find themselves warming to him – again, like Tom. Even though Aidan doesn't show up until we're ten minutes or so into the film, he really is the main protagonist and the emotional heart of the movie.

I grew up watching and loving 'The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin' and plays from the 'Play for Today' stable, like Mike Leigh's 'Meantime' and especially Dennis Potter's 'Blue Remembered Hills'. This film is an ode to all those influences. It was self-funded – a truly liberating experience for me to finally have full control over one of my movies. It felt like I was starting over. Even though this is my third movie, I kind of see it as my debut.

Bad Teacher

USA 2011

Director: Jake Kasdan

Certificate 15 91m 51s

The bad, cinematically speaking, are good company. Think of Patty McCormack in *The Bad Seed*, Harvey Keitel and Nicolas Cage in their respective *Bad Lieutenants*, Billy Bob Thornton in *Bad Santa*, Luis Homs in *Bad Education* – these aren't people you'd want to be stuck in a lift with but they're delicious to watch. Cameron Diaz's Elizabeth Halsey offers a similar frisson: closest, of those, to Thornton's character, she sits in loco parentis and treats her responsibilities with indifference bordering on resentment and disgust. She's hungover in class. She gets high in the parking lot. She tells an eager beaver beaver mommy's baked goods that "these cookies suck" and advises her to downgrade her ambitions from president to masseuse. Her teaching methods consist of playing school-themed movies such as *Stand and Deliver*, *Lean on Me*, *Dangerous Minds* and, er, *Scream*; at her most inspirational, she tries to impart literary appreciation through dodgeball but is soon marking the resulting assignments with comments such as, "Are you *fucking* kidding me?" Not just lazy, Elizabeth is also a nasty piece of work: a gold-digger and blackmailer, she defrauds the school board, drugs a state employee and uses poison ivy on a colleague she later frames for possession. Her main motivation for most of the film is scamming enough money to get a boob job to net a rich husband.

So why do we like her? Diaz deserves much of the credit. Her performance is pleasingly scathing: contrast it with the cheesy twinkle she's still obliged to roll out for the likes of *The Green Hornet* and you get a sense of a finger being stuck up to Hollywood norms of identifiable female behaviour. There's also the fact that her main foil is so obnoxious. As rival teacher Amy Squirrel, Lucy Punch delivers a relishable caricature of goody-goody neurosis that gives an idea of the kind of middle-school teacher *Election's* Tracy Flick might have grown up to be. There's also strong comic support from Phyllis Smith and John Michael Higgins as fellow teachers and a sly turn from Jason Segel as an amiable gym teacher. Only Justin Timberlake, as a geeky-smooth newcomer to the faculty, seems miscast.

Director Jake Kasdan has form in education comedy, having directed episodes of *Freaky and Geeks* (in which Segel appeared), *Grosse Pointe and Undeclared*, as well as the movies *Orange County* (2002) and *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story* (2007), so the school milieu is plausible. The plotting can feel arbitrary, the gag rate is hit and miss and there's an appropriately adolescent, philistine edge at times: poetry and songwriting are the realm of dorks and losers here as in high school. The most pleasing humour is oblique and, as often as not, left hanging: a straitlaced teacher gets stoned; the



Not playing ball: Cameron Diaz

principal has a thing for dolphins; Amy had a mysterious breakdown in 2008.

Of course, Elizabeth eventually undergoes redemption but it's of a limited kind: she comes round to taking a bit of responsibility for the kids' welfare and pursuing a relationship on the basis of support and satisfaction rather than material gain. But she doesn't see the error of her ways, and

enjoys the fruits of her reprehensible behaviour. This implication – that when we improve ourselves and our lives it's piecemeal and contingent and we hang on to aspects that maybe we shouldn't – seems a bit more like life than your average movie. *Bad Teacher*, like its subject, doesn't try too hard and, in the end, is more likeable for it.

► Ben Walters

CREDITS

Produced by
Jimmy Miller
David Householder
Written by
Gene Stupnitsky
Lee Eisenberg
Director of Photography
Alar Kivilo
Edited by
Tara Timponi
Production Designer
Jefferson Sage
Music
Michael Andrews
Production Mixer
John Pritchett
Costume Designer
Debra McGuire

CAST

Cameron Diaz
Elizabeth Halsey
Justin Timberlake
Scott Delacorte
Lucy Punch
Amy Squirrel
John Michael Higgins
Principal Wally Snur
Jason Segel
Russell Gettis
Phyllis Smith
Lynn Davies
Thomas Lennon
Carl Halabi
Molly Shannon
Melody, Garrett's mom
Eric Stonestreet
Kirk

Dave (Gruber) Allen
Sandy Pinkus
Matthew J. Evans
Garrett Tiara
Kaitlyn Dever
Sasha Abernathy
David Paymer
Doctor Vogel

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Production Companies
Columbia Pictures presents a Mosaic production
Executive Producers
Lee Eisenberg
Gene Stupnitsky
Jake Kasdan
Georgia Kacandes

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour
Prints by DeLuxe
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

8.266 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Illinois, the present. After her fiancé dumps her for being a gold-digger, indifferent teacher Elizabeth Halsey reluctantly returns to John Adams Middle School. While doing as little work as possible, she rebuffs genial gym teacher Russell and butters up wealthy new faculty member Scott. Learning that he likes big breasts, Elizabeth resolves to acquire \$10,000 for a boob job, starting by co-opting a school car-wash event.

Scott starts dating Amy, a gratingly chipper colleague who dislikes Elizabeth's attitude and is increasingly suspicious of her behaviour. Elizabeth learns that the teacher whose class scores highest on a state test wins a cash bonus. She briefly tries to apply proper teaching methods, then tracks down Carl, an administrator with the state education board. Posing as a journalist, she gets him drunk, drugs him and steals the test answers. She wins the bonus and books her boob job.

After using poison ivy to incapacitate Amy, Elizabeth accompanies Scott and Russell on a school trip. Amy discovers illegal drugs and evidence of the examination fraud in Elizabeth's desk. Scott cheats on Amy with Elizabeth, who secretly phones Amy so that she can hear them. After a romantic but socially awkward student is humiliated, Elizabeth gives him a successful pep talk. Amy accuses Elizabeth of fraud but Elizabeth blackmails Carl into supporting her, and frames Amy using her own illegal drugs. Amy is disgraced and transferred to a failing school. Scott propositions Elizabeth but she rejects him for Russell. She becomes the school's guidance counsellor.

Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo

USA 2009

Director: Jessica Oreck

The debut feature by writer-director Jessica Oreck, *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* could make a very pleasant installation, perhaps as part of an exhibition on the film's subject, which is the relationship of insects to Japanese culture. It would be easy to dip in and out of *Beetle Queen* as it flows – or rambles – between Japan's cities and countryside, between zoology and anthropomorphism. As a film to watch from start to finish, however, it asks a great deal of our attention for 90 minutes. Even viewers who are enthusiastic about Japan, insects or both may find *Beetle Queen* more soporific than compelling.

Beetle Queen's premise is that Japan's fascination with insects reflects and clarifies the nation's culture, especially in its aesthetics and religion. Even the ongoing *Pokémon* cartoon franchise was inspired by creator Tajiri Satoshi's childhood experience of collecting bugs. *Beetle Queen's* opening narration (in Japanese, subtitled) brings up the 19th-century Greek-born poet Lafcadio Hearn, along with earlier Japanese scholars, who believed that Japan's essence was bound up with its rarefied ways of thought. Hearn wrote: "The people that could find delight, century after century, in watching the ways of insects, and in making verses about them, must have comprehended, better than we, the simple pleasure of existence." The film concludes on a similarly grandiloquent note: "Insects, in their minuscule being, represent the entire history of a culture." This rhetoric will raise some ideological hackles, and begs obvious questions.

For example, given that the Japanese were (and still are) very taken with Victorian Britain, might their fascination with bugs have been influenced by our own mania for butterfly- and insect-catching in the 19th century? Moreover, the use of insects in elucidating Japan sounds fine when quoting literature of a thousand years ago or more, but doesn't seem so helpful in understanding the history of Japan's last century.

Elsewhere, though, the film makes uncontentious and useful links between insects and Japan's other cultural microcosms: haikus, bonsai, the animist religions ascribing souls to the smallest bug. The Buddhist respect for insects, though, sits comically with a scene in which children turn bugs into pincushions. Oreck, who works at the American Museum of Natural History, was inspired by David Attenborough's *The Private Life of Plants* (1995), but the insects in her film mostly lead anything but private lives, poked and pinned remorselessly. You share the people's (especially the children's) fascination with the monstrous rhino-like beetles and the fairy-translucent moths, but the



'Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo'

film never asks if it would be better were the Japanese to celebrate them less and leave the poor things alone.

The film, though, isn't a structured argument but a very loose collection of vignettes, arguably less a thesis than a travelogue with pretensions. Professional bug-hunters seek insects in the trees, Tokyo kids buy and play with insects, crowds gather at dusk to see fireflies, and montages push clichéd comparisons of city crowds with bugs. Some of the sequences are affecting, but also annoyingly flawed. For example, we feel distanced from the firefly viewing, even though it was plainly magical for the people there, because we only see it through grainy night-vision.

We learn next to nothing about the participants we see; if only the impressionist flow would give way here and there to conventional narrative. It would have been great to learn about the background of the pro bug-hunter who appears throughout the film, or the affable-looking bug celebrity who's glimpsed at a collectors' fair. Oreck has picked a subject well worth a documentary, but her film's elisions are more exasperating than artful. ➡ **Andrew Osmond**

CREDITS

Produced by
Jessica Oreck
Written by
Jessica Oreck
Camera
Sean Price Williams
Edited by
Theo Angell
Jessica Oreck
Music Composed and Arranged by
JC Morrison
Sound Design
Nate Shaw

©Myriapod Productions, LLC
Production Company
Myriapod Productions presents

WITH

Dr Takeshi Yoro
interview with

Haruku Shinozaki
narrated by

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
November Films

SYNOPSIS An impressionistic documentary depicting the Japanese people's fascination with insects. We see numerous scenes of Japanese people catching, collecting and keeping insects, interspersed with other scenes of Japanese life. A voiceover narration makes connections between the Japanese love of insects and other facets of the country's culture.



Gay's the word: Christopher Plummer, Ewan McGregor

Beginners

USA 2010

Director: Mike Mills

Certificate 15 **104m** **30s**

"Tell her the darkness is about to drag us down unless you do something," urges Arthur, encouraging his depressed roommate Oliver to make a move on adorable actress Anna. But since this quirky, low-key dramedy is Mike Mills's follow-up to the gloriously left-field *Thumbsucker* (2005), Arthur is, naturally, a Jack Russell terrier who speaks only in subtitles. He's just one of a slew of self-consciously oddball conceits that mark out, but also weigh down, this sweet but terminally meandering tale.

Mills was one of the directors who brought both a distinctive visual sense and an original sensibility to the 1990s prestige commercial and music-video boom, in work such as *Everything But the Girl's* 'Temperamental' promo. But in this semi-autobiographical second feature, his urge to express morose artist Oliver's emotional journey through frequent recourse to (deep breath...) doggie chats, retro-styled graphic and photo montages, wistful commentary, childhood flashbacks, whimsical graffiti campaigns and a faux-naïf ongoing art project entitled 'The History of Sadness' splinters the story and slows proceedings to a crawl. Sad to say, this creative cladding soon feels like hipster eye-candy decorating the coming-to-terms-with-life narrative underneath, providing repetition rather than thematic resonance – particularly since there's a halting, understated charm that requires little garnish in the inept, stop-start courtship of thirtysomething Oliver and footloose Anna, battered into self-reliance by miserable childhoods and now struggling to shuck off their joint commitment-phobia.

As in *Thumbsucker*, Mills shows an unexpected compassion for his characters, shooting them simply, and giving Ewan McGregor and Mélanie Laurent breathing space to fill out the lovers beyond their slightly precious presentation. McGregor, whose role requires Olympic-standard moping,

is quietly impressive, while Laurent is forced to rely more on kooky posturing. Both efforts are cast into shadow, however, by Christopher Plummer, who gobbles up the role of Oliver's ebullient father Hal, busily coming out as a septuagenarian gay and teaching Oliver to seize life's chances as he succumbs his own to cancer. Plummer, who is having his own late-life flowering, with notable turns in *The Last Station* and *My Dog Tulip*, brings a comic energy but also a determined dignity to Hal's dive into bar-hopping and a May-December love affair that encourages Oliver to overcome the psychic wounds inflicted by his parents' passionless marriage.

As part of the film's formal tricksiness, the story of Hal's coming-out and his passing away unwinds around Oliver's subsequent love affair to make a two-timescale narrative. This allows Plummer's breezy interludes (including a delightful sequence in which an ailing Hal rewrites Jesus's

life story, since the original Bible version is "far too violent") to kick-start the film whenever the love story is idling under a ton of solipsistic artwork and dog-related story detours.

The wealth of narrative overlap with Mills's own experience suggests that *Beginners* is a deeply personal project for him. Like mid-period Woody Allen it uses a bittersweet and formally innovative comic autobiography to fashion something that also recognises a generational hang-up, in this case the anhedonia or emotional diffidence that plagues Oliver and Anna. Would that he had also adopted Allen's post-shooting mode, a fierce paring away of any inclusions, however delightful, that unbalanced the whole. One can only regret this writer-director's decision to cram so much material into the mix that some fine understated performances, and much of the film's emotional impact, are obscured along the way. ➡ **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by
Leslie Urdang
Dean Vanech
Miranda de Pencier
Jay Van Hoy
Lars Knudsen
Written by
Mike Mills
Director of Photography
Kasper Lutzen
Film Editor
Oliver Bugge Coulté
Production Designer
Shane Valentino

Music

Roger Neill
David Palmer
Brian Reitzell
Sound Designer
Leslie Shatz
Costume Designer
Jennifer Johnson

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Production Companies
Focus Features and
Olympus Pictures
present in association
with Parts & Labor

CAST

Ewan McGregor
Oliver
Christopher Plummer
Hal
Mélanie Laurent
Anna
Goran Visnjic
Andy
Kai Lennox
Elliot
Mary Page Keller
Georgia
Keegan Boos
young Oliver
China Shavers
Shauna

Melissa Tang

Liz

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

9,405 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, 2003. Graphic artist Oliver clears out his dead father Hal's house. His lonely months of mourning are intercut with a parallel narrative relating Hal's coming-out at the age of 75, his zest for his new gay life and his death from cancer five years later. We also see flashbacks to Oliver's eccentric childhood and his child's-eye view of his parents' asexual marriage.

Depressed after Hal's death, Oliver meets free-spirited French actress Anna at a party, and they start a tentative relationship. He begins an ill-appreciated art project entitled 'The History of Sadness'. In flashback we see Hal reacting to his illness by partying exuberantly and enjoying the company of his much younger boyfriend Andy. Hal and Oliver become closer as his illness progresses, and Hal confesses to his son about his empty marriage. He tells the morose Oliver to live, and love, in the moment.

Anna and Oliver become warily committed to one another. She moves in, but soon leaves again, unable to relax around Oliver. Inspired by Andy and Hal's love, Oliver chases after her, determined to overcome his commitment-phobia. They are reconciled.



Pawn stars: Boris Spassky, Bobby Fischer

Bobby Fischer against the World

USA/United Kingdom/
Germany 2010
Director: Liz Garbus

Books or films about the American chess genius Bobby Fischer are bound to have a lopsided feel. Although Fischer died in 2008, the crowning moment in his life came in 1972, when, aged 29, he beat the Soviet grandmaster Boris Spassky in the World Championship. The next 36 years were messy and morbidly fascinating. The world's greatest chess player became a recluse and stopped doing the one thing he excelled at – playing chess. He was the genius in exile. The hope that he might re-emerge to add to his reputation gradually ebbed, to be replaced by dismay at his anti-Semitic rants. When he played a rematch with Spassky in the early 1990s, he wasn't the same force.

The first Fischer-Spassky match made worldwide news. As archive footage included in Liz Garbus's *Bobby Fischer against the World* reminds us, it knocked Watergate and the Vietnam War off the headlines. The match has spawned many articles and books (among them George Steiner's *White Knights of Reykjavik*) and understandably it is the pivotal event in Garbus's film.

Garbus doesn't ignore the second half of Fischer's life but nor does she devote an undue amount of time to it. "A good chess player is paranoid on the board," one of her interviewees tells us – the ability to foresee threats from wherever they may come is a blessing. The problems start when that paranoia extends beyond the chess world, as it did with Fischer. "His genius and his illness are joined at the hip," another interviewee offers.

Combining archive footage and photographs with contemporary interviews in a manner familiar from

countless other documentary portraits, Garbus's film provides no revelations for anyone who has followed Fischer's story. Even so, it is poignant and unsettling. Fischer's mother Regina would be worth a documentary in her own right. An American communist from the Rosenberg era, she was under investigation by the FBI; a single mother, protester, factory worker and doctor, she was highly educated and fiercely driven but a lousy parent who neglected the young Bobby – one reason why he sought solace in chess. What's also striking here is how good-looking and charismatic Fischer was in his twenties. The film includes footage from chat shows and photographs in which he looks like an intense young actor from the Method school.

CREDITS

Produced by
Liz Garbus
Rory Kennedy
Stanley Buchthal
Matthew Justus
Cinematography
Robert Chappell
Edited by
Karen Schmeier
Michael Levine
Original Music
Philip Sheppard

Sound Recordists
Arni Guðafsson
Steve Haywood
Mark Maloff
Matt Sutton

©6464 Productions
LLC
Production Companies
HBO Documentary
Films in association with
LM Media presents a
Moxie Firecracker

An impressive array of interviewees has been assembled to pore over Fischer's life and career, among them grandmasters Garry Kasparov and Susan Polgar and former US champion Larry Evans. What emerges from their reminiscences is a mix of awestruck admiration and exasperation – Fischer had a knack of antagonising even his closest supporters. The footage of him late in his life in Iceland – a bearded figure in a baseball cap – reveals just how objectionable he could be. At the same time Garbus makes clear that Fischer was a victim, a lonely, neglected kid who somehow "penetrated the secrets of chess in his Brooklyn apartment" but whose mastery of the sport came at the expense of almost every other aspect of his life.

➔ **Geoffrey Macnab**

production
ABBC co-production
with the support of ZDF
in collaboration with
ARTE
Executive Producers
Dan Cogan
Nick Fraser
Maja Hoffmann
Martin Pieper
Film Extracts
Me & Bobby Fischer
(2009)

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof Pictures

SYNOPSIS A documentary about Bobby Fischer, the self-taught American chess prodigy who became a grandmaster in 1958, aged 14. His mother, communist activist Regina Fischer, divorced Hans Gerhardt Fischer in 1945, when Bobby was two. She was constantly working and the young Fischer was left alone or with his older sister Joan for long periods. He blossomed into one of the best chess players in the US and became a celebrity. His relationship with his mother frayed and she moved out of their apartment when he was 16. By then, he had learned that Hans Gerhardt Fischer wasn't his father: his real father was Paul Nemenyi, a Jewish Hungarian physicist who died when he was around nine.

In 1972, Fischer challenged Soviet grandmaster Boris Spassky for the World Championship. The match, staged in Iceland, had strong political undertones because of the ongoing Cold War. Fischer trained hard for the match but his erratic behaviour was becoming apparent. The match was very nearly abandoned but Fischer eventually won.

Fischer began living as a recluse and became notorious for his anti-Semitism. He was lured out of retirement for a rematch with Spassky in 1992, but by then both players were past their best. Fischer won but was warned by the authorities that he was violating UN sanctions by competing in Yugoslavia during the Balkan Wars. He faced jail but was eventually given asylum by Iceland, the country where he'd enjoyed his greatest triumph. He died there in 2008.

Born to Be Wild 3D

USA 2010
Director: David Lickley

An elephant's trunk sucks up water and squirts it directly at the camera, making it impossible not to flinch – and not to be charmed by this 3D documentary about orphaned animals and the zoologists and park wardens who rescue and rehabilitate them. Stressing a liberal form of 'parenting', the film focuses on nurture, individuality, play and – in the moving final scene where the elephants' ears appear to flap in time to K'naan's World Cup song 'Wavin' Flag' – freedom.

That anthemic tune, like the spectacular use of 3D IMAX, is unashamedly propagandist – but put to good service. Dr Biruté Galdikas, based in Borneo, and Dame Daphne Sheldrick, in Kenya, have 30 years' experience of caring for orangutans and elephants respectively, and it's easy to see why they felt such a film might aid their cause. Immersing audiences in the presence of the animals heightens our sense of involvement, both at moments of threat, such as when an orphan has to be rescued from a pack of bull elephants, and intimacy, as when the traumatised creature is later lulled to sleep by his keeper.

Despite being called 'fairy godmothers', these women are conservationists with scientific acumen: Dame Daphne has developed a milk formula that keeps the orphaned elephants alive; Dr Galdikas, who was mentored by anthropologist Louis Leakey, studies orangutans in the wild. This is science with a difference, what feminist scientist Donna Haraway calls 'relational', where the researcher is deeply involved with her subjects. Dr Galdikas shares coffee and food with the orangutans; Dame Daphne speaks of the elephant nursery as a continuation of her late husband's conservation

SYNOPSIS A documentary about the work of the Nairobi Elephant Nursery in Kenya's Tsavo National Park, and also the Orangutan Care Center and Quarantine in Tanjung Puting National Park in Borneo.

The former was established in 1977 by Dame Daphne Sheldrick in memory of her husband, conservationist David Sheldrick, to care for wild elephants orphaned by poachers. Dame Daphne and her keepers rescue and care for the elephants, playing with them and feeding them a milk formula developed by Dame Daphne. When they are old enough, the elephants are returned to the wild.

In Borneo, orphaned orangutans are fed, cuddled and nurtured by Dr Biruté Galdikas and her team of carers. The orangutans develop independence through playing on a jungle gym, until eventually they can be released into the forest.



Jungle junior: Born to Be Wild 3D'

work, and a replacement for her loss. What the film doesn't represent is the women's role beyond the maternal, as eloquent advocates for saving the animals' physical environments from politically and economically motivated devastation. And somewhat disingenuously, it glosses over the reasons for the presence of loggers and poachers much as *Bambi* does, presenting them as risks on a par with lion attacks. What the film does capture, however, is the dedication and intelligence of both women, which (along with the cuteness of the animals) may inspire young viewers to become involved in conservation. Inverting that initial image of the elephant's trunk seemingly emerging from the screen, young viewers will want to enter into this world. **◆ Sophie Mayer**

CREDITS

Produced by
Drew Fellman
Written by
Drew Fellman
Director of Photography
David Douglas
Editor
Beth Spiegel
Music
Mark Mothersbaugh
Sound Designer
Peter Thillaye

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Entertainment Inc.
Production Companies
A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation
An IMAX Filmed Entertainment production
An IMAX experience

WITH

Dr Birutė Mary Gaidikas
Dr Dame Daphne M. Sheldrick

In Colour
[1.44:1]
3D

Distributor
BFI IMAX Cinema

Break My Fall

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Kanchi Wichmann

Set in Hackney, currently London's most fashionable borough, Kanchi Wichmann's debut feature strives for an aura of East End edginess and grit as it spans three days in the lives of a group of twentysomething friends. But although *Break My Fall* avoids the gimmicky commercialism of films such as rave-culture tribute *Human Traffic* (1999), it's still teen bubblegum more reminiscent of TV's *Skins* than anything else. Young unknowns Sophie Anderson, Kat Redstone, Kai Brandon Ly and Collin Clay Chace give patchy performances as, respectively, lesbian couple Sally and Liza and their friends Vin (who's straight but works as a rentboy) and Jamie (a gay barman who longs to settle down). Drug-fuelled partying is their typical evening default, a characteristically contrived scene finding Vin and Jamie on a rooftop in the early hours, coked up and musing on how their lives differ from those of the city's ordinary day-jobbing masses. While the film is laudable in its attempt to show diverse lifestyles and sexual identities, it never quite transcends a forced sense of box-checking; for all that they differ from straitlaced hetero stereotypes, the characters fall back time and again on clean-living, love-and-marriage values to cast a disparaging eye on their own chaotic personal dramas.

Sally and Liza's unravelling relationship is at the film's heart, and is the most fleshed-out plot thread. Admirably, any attempt to titillate a potentially voyeuristic straight audience with ultra-femme lesbians is avoided: Liza, with her cropped hair, baggy trousers and androgynous features, is initially indistinguishable from a boy – an ambivalence only

resolved part-way through by a shot of her on the lavatory. Her insecurities – which increase when Sally receives a package in the post from her German ex – feed the relationship's jealous, mutually destructive nature. But even a raw argument veering into physical violence doesn't take the film close to the emotional clout of, say, Wong Kar-Wai's portrait of a gay relationship's breakdown in *Happy Together* (1999).

While the casually ambling structure is clearly meant to give a lo-fi feel, it leaves the film short of dramatic tension. The shaky camerawork and rough-edged production values are no shortcut to grit, nor is the inordinate amount of vomiting during the characters' heavy nights. Despite soundtrack music from UK indie acts such as Micachu, and iconic Hackney locations cropping up throughout, the film feels as if it could have been shot anywhere – suggesting it's hardly destined for cult status as a portrayal of this decade's margin-dwelling London youth. **◆ Carmen Gray**

CREDITS

Produced by
Kanchi Wichmann
Producers
Matteo Rollieri
Billy Witz
Written by
Kanchi Wichmann
Director of Photography
David Pietkiewicz
Film Editor
Gaia Borretti
Set Designer
Juliette Rodrigues
Sound Designer
Lin Sangster
Wardrobe Supervisor
Ana Carolina Minozzo

©Break My Films Ltd.
Production Company
A Break My Films production
Executive Producer
Rudolf Wichmann

CAST

Kat Redstone
Liza
Sophie Anderson
Sally
Collin Clay Chace
Jamie
Kai Brandon Ly
Vin
Morgan Rhys
Oscar
Yariv Perelmutter
chef
Anthony Walker
wheelchair guy
Rob Schwarz
drummer
Timberlina
Royal Vauxhall Tavern
host
Chéo Rhodes
Mo

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Peccadillo Pictures Ltd



Hackneyed: Kat Redstone, Sophie Anderson

SYNOPSIS Hackney, London, present day. Sally and her live-in girlfriend Liza are trying to find success with their band Blanket. They are having relationship trouble, fuelled by Liza's suspicion that Sally still holds a torch for her German ex. With friends Jamie and Vin, they vent their insecurities and frustrations through drugs and partying. On Liza's birthday, Sally storms out of a café after Liza argues with the waitress. Liza takes MDMA alone and is almost too far gone to attend her own birthday dinner, but is helped there late by Jamie. The friends go to a warehouse party. Jamie, who is gay, is tired of one-night stands and longs for a stable relationship; at the party he meets a man he really likes, who needs to be in Liverpool the next day for a funeral. Jamie offers to drive him, and the whole gang set out. In the car, Vin, who is dissatisfied with his work as a rentboy, asks Sally to go home with him. She responds ambivalently. Liza decides to stay in London and let the others go on without her.

Breath Made Visible

Switzerland 2009
Directors: Ruedi Gerber

Anna Halprin has been dancing all her life. As a girl, she tells us, she danced for fun; as a teenager to rebel. In the 1960s she danced for social justice in response to the Los Angeles race riots and the Vietnam War. And after a brief career on Broadway, in which her skills as a comic performer shone out, she relocated to San Francisco with her beloved husband and longtime artistic collaborator Larry. Here they took a leap in the dark, opening their home and woodland garden to dancers who shared their artistic curiosity, and would work with Anna to reinvent modern dance through collaborative exploration. In the 1950s Halprin founded the pioneering San Francisco Dancers' Workshop, the first multiracial dance collective in the US, and thereafter gained notoriety with ensemble shows featuring nudity as well as provocative dance content. On her return from a controversial performance of 'Parades and Changes' (1965) in Sweden, the San Francisco press dubbed her troupe "the no-pants dancers", and the New York authorities threatened her with arrest for indecent exposure should she bring the show to the city.

This inspiring documentary reveals how dance has been both Halprin's life-force and her professional instrument, one that has arguably found its greatest purpose in her later years in her work with the elderly, disabled and terminally ill. Her fervent belief that dance can transform lives and communities is asserted here with utter conviction, and energetically illustrated with concrete examples of the empowering and healing effects of dance on the diverse groups of people she has encountered over the years.

The particular joy of this film lies largely in the artist's story: her growth, her early success, her reprioritising of her life's work following a period of illness, and her continued commitment to her art in old age. Speaking – and dancing – on a New York stage in 2002, the 82-year-old Halprin recounts how she withdrew from public performance following cancer in middle age, and thereafter found new purpose in working with cancer and Aids sufferers. The footage of Halprin leading a community of men with Aids in a ritualistic haka affirms her faith in the enormous power of bodies working in physical harmony, and leaves no doubt about the life-force that propels these men onwards; they defiantly declare themselves alive, their breath – as in the film's lyrical title – made visible in the dance. Even more moving are two of the later performances. In 'Seniors Rocking', a community of older citizens, some in their eighties and nineties, mostly seated, some in wheelchairs, are led in a dance of hands, arms and tentative touch. The intense pleasure they take in their own bodies, and in the performance they have created together, ➡

is as uplifting to watch as it must have been to participate in. 'Intensive Care', meanwhile, is a profoundly disturbing and deliberately grotesque meditation on mortality, inspired by Larry's protracted suffering in the month leading up to his death. The paradox of this spectacle is utterly overwhelming: Halprin's diminished body as a poignant signifier of decay and human frailty, tempered by the sheer stamina and intense emotion of her terror, suffering and grief in the face of extinction.

Were the film to conclude on the act's closing piñata – a frail Halprin cradled in the arms of a young muscular dancer – the positive message of the film, and of Halprin's vision, would be catastrophically undermined. Instead – and with relief – viewers are taken back to the scene of the New York stage in 2002, where she tells us why and how she will still be dancing when she is 90, 100, 110. The film closes on a montage of shots of the natural world that have punctuated the very personal yet universal story we have just been told. Dance is a function of nature, not the reverse; this is the message to which the artist has devoted her extraordinarily rich life.

◆ Sue Harris

CREDITS

Produced by
Ruedi Gerber

Story Consultant
Deborah Dickson

Camera
Adam Teichman

Edited by
François Durovlin

Original Music
Mario Grigorov

Sound
Michael Emery

©ZAS Film AG
ZAS Films presents a film by Ruedi Gerber

Soundtrack
"Concerto in D Minor II"

by Alessandro Marcello;
"Araber Tants" – The

Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band;
"Glassy Sheen" –

Richard Friedman; "Il
Trovatore tacea la notte"

by Giuseppe Verdi;
"Procession" – Morton

Sobotnick; "Downtown"
– Petula Clark;

"Woodstock" – Leigh
Gracie; "Gotham

Lullaby" – Meredith
Monk; "Intensive Care"

– Miguel Frascón; "Four
Seasons – Summer" by

Antonio Vivaldi – Terry
King-Devine;

"Freylekhs" – The Flying
Bulgar Klezmer Band;

"La Giacconda – Dance
of the Hours" by

Amilcare Ponchielli;
"Laborintus II" by

Luciano Berio –
Ensemble Musique

Vivante, Luciano Berio;
"Parades and Changes"

by Morton Sobotnick –
Morton Sobotnick; "The

Warmth of the Sun" –
The Beach Boys; "Go

Guitar" – John Denon,
Neil Myers, Zizi Neri;

"Red Nosed Clown" –
Francis Fumiere

WITH
Anna Halprin

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
West Grove Film &
Media

SYNOPSIS A documentary about American dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin (born 1920). The film uses archive material to explore and reflect on Halprin's artistic journey and motivations, and complements this account of her personal development with photography of the natural world. Halprin's narration is a mixture of voiceover and direct-to-camera interviews, illustrated with family photographs, excerpts from her performances and video footage of dance workshops. She argues that dance is a democratic and healing force with the capacity to transform individual lives and communities, and rejects technique and formal training in favour of a more spiritual and therapeutic approach.

Cell 211

Spain/France 2009

Director: Daniel Monzón

Certificate 18 112m 34s

Outside his native Spain, Luis Tosar is probably best known for playing the heavy in Michael Mann's *Miami Vice* (2006). But at home, in films such as *Mondays in the Sun* (2002) and *Take My Eyes* (2003), he's made a name playing brutish males with uneasy relationships with feminine power. In Daniel Monzón's brawny prison drama *Cell 211*, that role takes a twist, with Tosar playing the aptly named Malamadre ('Badmother'), the psychopathic instigator of a jail riot who leads his fellow inmates with a mix of ruthless savagery and loyal maternalism. Thickset and shaven-headed, with a devilish goatee and deep-as-hell voice, Tosar's creation has become something of a cult figure in Spanish popular culture: he's Anton Chigurh with a social conscience, Hannibal Lecter with a trade-union card.

The performance earned Tosar a best actor Goya in 2010. It was part of a deserved sweep of eight gongs for Monzón's film, which offers a new spin on the alchemical mix of Hollywood entertainment and homegrown concerns that – with works such as *The Orphanage* (2007) – Spain has proved so proficient at producing.

The film follows rookie prison warden Juan (Argentinian newcomer Alberto Ammann), who is caught up in a riot after being knocked unconscious while visiting his new place of work. Abandoned in the titular cell, he's forced to pass himself off as a new inmate to ringleader Malamadre and his henchmen – including Carlos Bardem, Javier's brother, as Colombian leader Apache and Luis Zahera as a troglodytically bellowing junkie – in order to survive. Isolated from his pregnant wife Elena and toyed with by the monitoring authorities, he finds his identity shaken to the core as events conspire against him.

Monzón proves adept at managing the suspense: you'd never know someone removing their shoelaces could be so exciting until you see Juan shedding the items – belt, wallet – that identify him as an outsider.

There's a Scorsese-style intensity to the way Monzón ratchets up the tension of Juan's dilemmas, releasing the pressure with graphic violence – witness a rage-fuelled throat-slitting. The centre of the film, though, is Malamadre's mercurial relationship with Juan, moving from initial suspicion to admiration, sympathy and wrath. Part of Tosar's skill is to keep their increasingly intimate bond convincing without ever losing his menace.

Contemporary Spanish politics comes into play when Malamadre takes hostage three prisoners from Basque terrorist group ETA, whose political capital he exploits to make his demands. It's a tinderbox scenario that leads to copycat uprisings in other jails and ETA reprisals, but the movie is less interested in exploring this than



Under lock and qué: Luis Tosar

in tracking Juan's emotional arc and moralising about the treatment of society's unwanted.

An occasional televisual feel notwithstanding, it's the mounting improbability of this arc that mars proceedings. Not only are we asked to believe that Juan's prison visit coincides with the riot's outbreak, but also that some masonry knocks him out at the

moment trouble erupts; that he glances at a television the very instant Elena is filmed and, out of everyone protesting at the prison gates, it's she who is brutalised. The result is an absurd fatalism that undercuts everything else. More muscles than brains, *Cell 211* packs a powerful punch but finds explanations harder to come by.

◆ Nick Funnell

CREDITS

Produced by
Enma Lustres

Costumes
Montse Sancho

Stunt Co-ordinator
Ignacio Álvarez

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Morena Films S.L.

Telecinco Cinema, La
Fabrique 2

Production
Companies

Telecinco presents a

Vaca Films, Morena

Films, Telecinco Cinema

production

A co-production with La

Fabrique 2

With the participation of

Telecinco, AXN, TVG,

Canal+ España, Canal+

With the collaboration of

ICAA, Conselleria de

Cultura e Turismo,

Ayuntamiento de

Zamora, MEDIA

Programme

Director of
Photography

Carles Gusi

Editing
Cristina Pastor

Art Director
Antón Laguna

Music Composed
and Produced by

Roque Baños

Sound
Sergio Bürmann

Carlos Faruolo

Jaime Fernández

Costumes
Montse Sancho

Stunt Co-ordinator
Ignacio Álvarez

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Telecinco Cinema, La
Fabrique 2

Production
Companies

Telecinco presents a

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Ayuntamiento de

Zamora, MEDIA

Programme

Director of
Photography

Carles Gusi

Editing
Cristina Pastor

Art Director
Antón Laguna

Music Composed
and Produced by

Roque Baños

Sound
Sergio Bürmann

Carlos Faruolo

With the financial

support of IGAPPE and

ICO

In association with

Sofica EuropaCorp and

Sofica Soficinéma 4

Executive Producers
Enma Lustres

Borja Peña

Pilar Benito

Javier Ugarte

Elena Manrique

CAST

Luis Tosar

Malamadre

Alberto Ammann

Juan Oliver

Antonio Resines

José Utrilla

Manuel Morón

Ernesto Almansa

Carlos Bardem

Apache

Luis Zahera

Releches

Fernando Soto

Armando Nieto

Vicente Romero

Tachuela

Manolo Solo

prison governor

Marta Etura

Elena

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Optimum Releasing

10,131 ft +9 frames

Spanish theatrical title

Celda 211



LastExitToNowhere.com

Dancing Dreams

Germany 2010
Director: Anne Linsel

The documentary *Dancing Dreams* may never have received a UK theatrical release were it not for the buzz that greeted Wim Wenders's 3D film *Pina*, a tribute to the acclaimed experimental choreographer Pina Bausch, who died in June 2009. Which would have been a shame, as for me *Dancing Dreams* – which follows 40 German teenagers as they rehearse for a revival of her 1978 piece 'Kontakthof' – gives a much clearer insight into Bausch's working methods and captures the spirit of her life's endeavour more tellingly than the sterile if beautiful images of *Pina*.

Admittedly, Wenders's film looks entrancing – in particular the outdoor shots of Bausch's troupe snaking their way around a disused quarry, or dancing in a deserted industrial landscape, or surprising passengers on Wuppertal's cable-car public transport system. But taken together, the dancers' spoken reflections are so repetitive as to sound platitudinous, while their danced tributes often simply illustrate rather than illuminate their words.

The teenagers of *Dancing Dreams*, by contrast, respond to Bausch's work with a raw honesty that conveys the intensity of its emotional impact for collaborators and audiences alike. Anne Linsel and DP Rainer Hoffmann's film also wins out by capturing the process of creation as it happens, whereas Wenders's tribute, made after Bausch's death, can only describe it in words. And finally, *Dancing Dreams* features more footage of Pina Bausch herself, a mesmerisingly still, near-skeletal figure with large, wonderfully expressive hands, who calmly watches and then respectfully addresses the teenagers, smoking all the while.

These young people, many of whom had never danced before, were recruited from local schools. Most joined up expecting to have fun – and soon discovered that participation required serious commitment and would make emotional as well as physical demands. We watch as they gradually recognise the importance of nuance and control, of the precision required to position feet or eyes to achieve a particular effect, of the need to reach inside themselves in order to discover and then convey the emotions inherent in the piece. Some talk to camera about their lives: the Roma Muslim boy brought up with four brothers by a single mother; the girl whose father died in a gas explosion a couple of years previously; the Kosovan girl whose grandfather was burned alive by Serbs in 1993; the boy who has kissed plenty of girls but never caressed anyone with the tenderness required of him by Bausch's choreography. It's as if their youth allows them to experience the aggression and tenderness, love and loss in Bausch's exposition of human contact with a freshness and intensity older performers may have lost.

There has been much research about the value of creativity in increasing young people's motivation, self-esteem and resilience, as well as their ability to communicate, to think laterally, to take risks and work as part of a team. If more proof were needed, this project illustrates the theory in action, demonstrating how providing a learning experience where young people respond to high expectations, are involved in decision-making and work towards an authentic purpose brings about transformation – as well as increasing academic achievement. Unfortunately, the UK government has now cut funding to the Arts Council-backed Creative Partnerships scheme which put artists into schools to provide similar experiences. Perhaps someone could send a copy of *Dancing Dreams* to David Cameron and Michael Gove? **♥♦ Vicky Wilson**

CREDITS

Producer
Gerd Haag
Screenplay
Anne Linsel
Director of Photography
Rainer Hoffmann
Editor
Mike Schlömer
Sound Design
Uwe Dresch

© Tag/Traum
Production Companies
Real Fiction presents a Tag/Traum production in co-production with WDR in collaboration with ARTE
Sponsored by Deutscher Filmförderfonds, Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Ministerpräsident of Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dr Werner Jackstadt-Stiftung
Soundtrack
"Abends in der kleinen Bar"; "Im Rosegarten von la Plata"; "Einmal ist keinmal" by Ralph Benatzky; "Frühling und Sonnenschein"; "Tango Bolero"; "Granada"; "The Harry Lime Theme" from *The Third Man* by Anton Karas; "Blonde Cläre"; "Oh Fräulein Grete"; "Gnädige Frau sie sind ja

so schön"; "Valse triste" by Jean Sibelius

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

German theatrical title
Tanzräume

SYNOPSIS Wuppertal, Germany, 2008. Forty local teenagers – many of whom have never danced before – begin rehearsals for choreographer Pina Bausch's 'Kontakthof', which they will perform in the Tanztheater in ten months' time. The young people rehearse every Saturday with dancers Bénédicte Billet and Josephine Ann Endicott, who created one of the leading roles in the original 1978 piece. Pina Bausch visits to help choose the cast for the premiere and to comment on progress. As the performance date draws near, the cast shop for costumes and some of the young people are invited by the filmmakers to reflect on what the project has meant to them. The opening night's performance receives a standing ovation.

Film Socialisme

Switzerland/France 2010
Director: Jean-Luc Godard

It is among the peculiarities of experimental cinema that films which strike admirers as so full of absorbing detail that they can be exhausting to watch are frequently seen by detractors as so empty that they are impossible to sit through. The response to Jean-Luc Godard's latest and perhaps final feature, *Film Socialisme*, when it premiered at Cannes last year, partook of both tendencies, the negative position being represented at its most extreme by Mark Kermode, who in a BBC broadcast insisted that, "If anyone picks that film up and releases it and puts it into a cinema, I will be genuinely amazed. It is a steaming pile of *merde* and it is officially the low point of Cannes 2010." For the Cannes screening, Godard demanded that the film be accompanied by fragmented 'Navajo English' subtitles, irresistibly evoking memories of the moment in *Pravda* (1970) when an unsubtitled interview with a Czech worker is interrupted by a voiceover insisting, "If you don't understand Czech, you'd better learn it fast." These subtitles, which have been retained for the film's long-delayed UK theatrical release, suggest the director's contempt for monolingual adults, something also evident from the appearance in both the first and second sections of children who are fluent in more than one language.

Such motifs – including the frequent presence of animals and photographers, watches that fail to tell the time, repetitions of the phrase "Ach, Deutschland" – provide the main connections between the film's three quite different parts, which otherwise relate less to each other than to the various stages of Godard's career, suggesting a triple-bill of *Détective* (1985), *Numéro deux* (1975) and *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1997-98). Yet, as with Jacques Rivette's magnificent *36 vues du Pic Saint Loup* (2009 – still shamefully without a UK distributor), the sense that this is an old man's summing up of a lifetime's concerns is contradicted by the youthful energy, Godard's delight in the potential of video technologies – not just the slick imagery available at the hi-tech end of the spectrum but also the more elusive beauty that can be obtained from comparatively primitive equipment – making many of today's younger filmmakers look like old fogies.

This ability to juxtapose two kinds of image without defining one as superior to the other connects intriguingly with the film's structure, which playfully suggests a series of dialectical oppositions – money/water, sound/picture, state/individual, parent/child, Stalin/Hitler, distributing/producing, CinemaScope/16:9, space/time, cinema/video, film/socialism – without feeling the need to organise them into wider patterns, preferring to release them into the text and let them



Waiting for Godard: Marine Battaglia

wander where they will (like the animals that appear in so many shots). Even the contrast between those professional actors who appear in the first section and what are clearly passengers and staff who happened to be on the cruise ship where the film was shot (and who sometimes stare directly into the camera) suggests an opposition between meticulous formalism and a humanist resistance to formal structures.

Film Socialisme's lavish *mise en scène* (some scenes might be described as visual essays on the colour blue) recalls Godard's debt to such Hollywood auteurs as Sirk, Minnelli and even Ford (a world of meaning is suggested by juxtaposing a still from *Cheyenne Autumn* with a reference to the Israel/Palestine conflict), while his refusal to move the camera inevitably evokes late Ozu. But it is the stylistically more restrained central section, about a family whose children demand the right to play an active role in decision-making processes, that reveals the most diverse influences, its moments of tenderness (the shot of a young boy with eyes closed caressing his mother is surely among the most striking in modern cinema) reminding us that Jean Renoir (whose father is name-checked at one point) has never ceased to be an important reference point for Godard. This segment even utilises a form of classical construction, the initial shots of family members framed in solitary isolation gradually giving way to images in which the characters briefly cross each other's paths, and finally appear together in carefully balanced two-shots. For all the abuse thrown at Godard for his experimental 'indulgences', he would seem to be tentatively feeling his way towards a form of traditional filmmaking which, rather than representing a retreat from political commitment, could well be the most effective means of expressing it.

Godard's work has always been peculiarly difficult to discuss, given its tendency to challenge both our assumptions about what a film should (or should not) be, and the relevance of whatever aesthetic standards we choose to apply. But far from being a postmodernist determined to mock any and all values, JLG obliges us to define more carefully our criteria, treating stylistic practices as means of relating to a wider social world: his much quoted observation that "tracking shots are a question of

morality" is echoed by the self-interview that forms part of *Film Socialisme's* press-book, wherein the question "Fixed shots only?" meets with the response, "The chemist doesn't do tracking shots in front of his microscope, nor oil companies when drilling into the sea bed." Godard remains among the wildest of cinematic jokers, but, as this work triumphantly confirms, film and socialism are two things he still takes very seriously indeed. ➔ **Brad Stevens**

CREDITS

Producers

Ruth Waldburger
Alain Sarde

Screenplay

Jean-Luc Godard

Photography

Fabrice Aragno
Paul Grivas

Sound

François Musy
Renaud Musy
Gabriel Hafner

Production Companies

Vega Film and Wild
Bunch
Télévision Suisse

Romanide

Canal Plus

Suisseimage

Fond Regio

ECM Records

Office Fédéral Culture

George Foundation

Fondation Vaudoise

Ville Genève

Film Extracts

Viaggio in Italia/ Journey to Italy (1954)

Cheyenne Autumn (1964)

Tsahai (1994)

Medea

Don Quijote

Bronenosets

Potemkin/ Battleship Potemkin (1925)

Roman Karmen

L'Espoir (1945)

Adieu Bonaparte (1985)

La cara del terror/ The Face of Terror (1962)

La battaglia di Maratona/ The Battle of Marathon (1959)

Local Angel (2002)

The Devil's Tomb (2009)

Oktabr/ October (1928)

Week End/ Weekend (1967)

Mediterranean/ Mediterranean (1991)

Le quattro giornate di Napoli/ The Four Days of Naples (1962)

Le Vieil Homme et le désert (1988)

Lo sguardo di Michelangelo/ The Gaze of Michelangelo (2004)
Le Chant des mariées/ The Wedding Song (2008)
The Greek Civil War
Alexander the Great
Goryachiy sneg/ Burning Snow (1974)
Les Plages d'Agnès/ The Beaches of Agnès (2008)
Les Mille et Une Nuits/ The 1,001 Nights (1990)

CAST

Jean-Marc Stehlé

Agatha Couture

Mathias Dornahidy

Quentin Grosset

Olga Riazanova

Maurice Sarfati

Patti Smith

Lenny Kaye

Bernard Maris

Marie-Christine

Bergier

Nadège Beausson

Robert Maloubier

Dominique Devais

Alain Badiou

Elias Sanbar

Catherine Tanvier

Christian Sinniger

Marine Battaglia

Gulliver Hecq

Elidan Arzoni

Elisabeth Vitali

Eye Haidara

Blandine Bellavoir

Jean-Michel Fête

S. Henon

O. Schmitt

Dolby Digital/DTS

In Colour

[L78:1]

Distributor

New Wave Films

Onscreen credits give all names as initial(s) plus surname.

SYNOPSIS The film is composed of three independent sections. The first section is set aboard a Mediterranean cruise ship whose passengers include a Nazi-hunter, a German war criminal using the name Otto Goldberg, a Jewish banker, a Russian secret agent, singer Patti Smith and philosopher Alain Badiou.

The second section takes place at the Garage Martin in the South of France. Ten-year-old Lucien Martin and his teenage sister Florine demand that their parents Catherine and Jean-Jacques answer questions about the assumptions on which French society is built. The family's interactions are observed by a journalist and a camerawoman from the television station FR3.

The final section is an illustrated lecture on the countries that gave us "our humanities".

The Flaw

United Kingdom 2010

Director: David Singleton

Fredric Jameson's essay 'Cognitive Mapping' argues that the immensely abstract structures of capitalism – the global commodity chains, the arcane instruments of finance capital itself – are now so complex that they "are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualisable for most people". What cannot be directly experienced must, Jameson insists, be cognitively mapped, and *The Flaw* is an attempt at just such a mapping. It asks a simple but crucial question – what was it that led to the 2008 financial crisis? The answer has been obscured not only by the opacity and complexity of the financial system itself, but by deliberate ideological mystification – not least in the UK, where, outrageously, the deficit has been blamed on overspending in the public sector. In attempting to elucidate the causes of the crisis, therefore, *The Flaw* aims to be more than a documentary about recent history; it wants to be a political intervention.

The problem *The Flaw* faces is that there is nothing to see here: or rather what we can see are necessarily only fragments of a totality that eludes visualisation. Capitalism may be an image culture but there is no image of it. So what we are presented with here are (some very engaging and informed) talking heads, including economists Robert Shiller, Robert Frank and Joseph Stiglitz; some interviews with those who lost houses or saw their investments disintegrate; some graphs; and some images of computer screens and financial documents. A former trader turned Wall Street tour guide shows his tour party one of these documents – an example of a 'toxic asset', one of the infamous Collateralised Debt Obligations, the 'Frankensteinian security' that we started to hear so much about as the financial crisis began to break. *The Flaw* attempts to do what our everyday experience cannot – it joins the dots between these seemingly bland documents and the widespread social and economic devastation (repossessions, poverty, unemployment) that they ended up causing. At one point we see a computer screen showing 'delinquency rates' in mortgage repayments: destitution rendered as a series of figures.

The 'flaw' of the title is the glitch that former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan so graciously acknowledged – but only after the crash had happened. What for Greenspan is a 'flaw' is for most of the commentators interviewed here a systemic tendency. It's clear that what we are dealing with is not a simple case of mistaken policies, or greed – as Louis Hyman points out, capitalists are always greedy. That can't explain what has happened over the last 30 years. For both Hyman and Robert Shiller, the financial crisis was a consequence of the 'intellectual revolution' that



Having their cake and eating it: 'The Flaw'

took place in the 1970s and 1980s. Neoliberalism is never named as such in *The Flaw*, but the film nevertheless constitutes a devastating analysis of the damage caused by the neoliberal project to restore power and privilege to the superwealthy. One of Shiller's books, a kind of pre-emptive analysis of the dot-com crash, *Irrational Exuberance*, took its name from another of Greenspan's (in)famous phrases. The story of the past decade was supposed to be about the movement of investment capital from the virtual fool's gold of the dot-com boom into the supposed solidity of real estate. But *The Flaw* shows that this alleged attempt to rebalance priorities had quite another effect. Rather than anchoring the economy in bricks and mortar, the rush to invest in mortgages injected the vertiginous weightlessness of the speculative bubble into the housing market. Shiller's own research into house prices in the US turned up an astonishing revelation – he discovered that, up until 2000, there was no significant variation in house prices in real terms; since 2000, there has been a massive spike. What produced this spike was the tendency for people to treat their houses as assets (to be resold) rather than goods (to be used). Instead of reining this in, central banks encouraged it – the 'flaw' in their thinking was their belief in the 'efficient market hypothesis', which claims that, since the market always prices goods correctly, there can be no such thing as a speculative bubble. But asset markets function differently to markets in goods – if the prices of refrigerators rise too much, demand will decline; but if the prices of assets rise, demand will increase. Everyone was induced into becoming a capitalist – including the poorest. Surprisingly, 77 per cent of subprime loans went to those who already owned a home – the loans were not made so that people could buy houses; they were refinance loans that enticed them to treat their homes as assets.

SYNOPSIS A documentary about the causes and consequences of the 2008 financial crisis, featuring economists Robert Shiller, Robert Frank, Joseph Stiglitz and Louis Hyman.

What's missing from *The Flaw* is any concept of an alternative political agency. The film confirms that the past 30 years – the period of neoliberal ascendancy – has seen a massive concentration of wealth in the hands of a very small elite. The question is: how has this been allowed to happen? As Hyman argues, we can't explain this in moral terms. Even so, Hyman retains hope that a different kind of capitalism is possible. Via clips from 1950's animations and films about business, *The Flaw* repeatedly invokes pre-neoliberal capitalism as a halcyon period. But conditions in that period were the consequence of a compromise between capital and organised labour. What's remarkable about the last 30 years is not only the rise of a super-elite, but also the defeat and disappearance of organised labour. This disappearance is never mentioned in *The Flaw*, even though its effects can be felt in everything the film describes. The question *The Flaw* poses but never actually asks is: in the absence of organised labour (or another equally powerful anti-capitalist agent), what use is it simply to know all this stuff? Is *The Flaw* just offering us yet another interpretation of the world, when the point is to change it? ➔ **Mark Fisher**

CREDITS

Cinematography

Clive North

Film Editor

David Fairhead

Original Music

Philip Sheppard

Sound Recordist

Kevin Meredith

©Beak Street Films

Limited

Production Companies

A Studio Lambert

production in

association with

Dartmouth Films

A David Singleton film

Molinare

Executive Producers

Stephen Lambert

Christopher Hird

Luke Johnson

for Molinare:

Steve Milne

Mark Foligno

WITH

Robert Shiller

Robert Frank

Joseph Stiglitz

Dan Ariely
Robert Wade
Louis Hyman
George Cooper
Jim Fink
Steve Pennington
Jim O'Neill
Neil Minow
Sarah Ludwig
Josh Zinner
Ed Andrews
Andrew Luan
Antoinette Coffi-Ahibo
Steve Nahas
Rose Alfano
Lawrence Citarelli
Alex Chardiet

In Colour

[L78:1]

Distributor

Studio Lambert

Green Lantern

USA 2011

Director: Martin Campbell

Certificate 12A 113m 52s

In the late 1950s, at the dawn of what became known as the Silver Age, DC Comics' anthology title *Showcase* was used to revive 1940s heroes who had suffered the indignity of cancellation a generation earlier when the Superman-inspired boom faded. The Flash, Hawkman and Green Lantern – solid sellers but scarcely in the league of Superman, Batman or Wonder Woman, whose titles had survived – were dusted off and, in current terminology, rebooted.

The mood of the atomic age differed from the pulp-influenced 1940s, so heroes whose origins and powers were once supernatural were rethought in science-fiction terms, and civilian secret identities similarly benefited from an up-to-the-minute makeover. Green Lantern began as broadcaster-playboy Alan Scott, whose ring was empowered by a magic Chinese lantern; the *Showcase* relaunch – scripted simply by John Broome with streamlined art by Gil Kane – gave the ring an alien origin, and replaced Scott with Right Stuff test pilot Hal Jordan, who was drawn to look like Paul Newman. This Lantern earned his own title, relatively complex friendships with the Flash and Green Arrow, and a spot on the Justice League of America. Jordan has been through 50 years of ups and downs – including several deaths, replacements by other characters, a spell transformed into galactic menace Parallax and a triumphant return in a series scripted by Geoff Johns, which is the major source for this big-screen attempt to make Green Lantern the sort of franchise hero who gets multiple sequels.

It's a problem that *Green Lantern* opens with several narrated explanations of who the galactic players are, accompanying awe-inspiring 3D vistas of outer space with plodding footnotes, and then gets to Earth only to shuffle through leftovers from every other recent superhero franchise to whip up a grinning, ripped, outwardly-a-dick-but-deep-down-sensitive protagonist whose personal issues and supporting cast are strictly off the peg. The ring supposedly picks Hal Jordan out of everyone on Earth to become Green Lantern because he's fearless, but mandatory flashbacks to the traumatising death of little Hal's father in a plane explosion unpick this essential element of his character by making Ryan Reynolds's Jordan fearless except when he's reminded of that terrible day. In the usual McKee-approved character shorthand, this is also why he's a commitment-phobic, bed-hopping, self-sabotaging show-off unaccountably tolerated by his Lois, Perry and Jimmy analogues.

Martin Campbell depicted new iterations of Zorro (*The Mask of Zorro*, 1998) and James Bond (*Casino Royale*, 2006) as rough successors to heroic traditions, who grew into their allotted



Green piece: Mark Strong

roles through intrepid action and harsh life lessons. But whereas those franchises had already transcended their origins and established themselves in the popular imagination, Green Lantern is a newcomer outside his home medium, and there's not much here to differentiate him from any other grinning good guy who jokes

to cover his sensitive side. There's a sense of hurrying through set-up to save stuff for a sequel: GL's long-time Luthor-Joker-style nemesis Sinestro, played by an empurpled and moustachioed Mark Strong, is here grumpy but a goodie, beginning his transformation into arch-enemy only during the end credits.

◆ Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by

Donald De Line
Greg Berlanti

Screenplay

Greg Berlanti
Michael Green
Marc Guggenheim
Michael Goldenberg

Screen Story

Greg Berlanti
Michael Green
Marc Guggenheim
Based upon characters appearing in comic books published by DC Comics

Director of Photography

Dion Beebe

Edited by

Stuart Baird

Production Designer

Grant Major

Music

James Newton Howard

Sound Designers

Peter Staubli
Harry Cohen
Dino DiMuro
Christopher Assells
Scott Martin Gershini
Costume Designer
Ngila Dickson

Visual Effects and Animation

Sony Pictures
ImageWorks Inc.

Visual Effects

Peerless Camera
Company, London
Rising Sun Pictures
Pixomondo
DigiScope
Hydraulx
BUF
Pixel Playground, Inc.
MPC

Stunt Co-ordinator

Gary Powell

© Warner Bros.
Entertainment Inc.

Production Companies

A Warner Bros. Pictures
presentation
A De Line Pictures
production
Executive Producers
Herbert W. Gains
Andrew Haas

CAST

Ryan Reynolds
Hal Jordan/Green
Lantern

Blake Lively

Carol Ferris

Peter Sarsgaard

Dr Hector Hammond

Mark Strong

Sinestro

Angela Bassett

Dr Amanda Waller

Tim Robbins

Senator Robert
Hammond

Temuera Morrison

Abin Sur

Jay O. Sanders

Carl Ferris

Jon Tenney

Martin Jordan

Taika Waititi

Tom Kalmaku

Geoffrey Rush

voice of Tomar-Re

Michael Clarke

Duncan

voice of Kilowog

Clancy Brown

voice of Parallax

Dolby Digital/DTS/

SDDS

Colour by

Technicolor

2.35:1 [Panavision]

3D

Distributor

Warner Bros.

Distributors (UK)

10,248 ft +0 frames

Hobo with a Shotgun

Canada 2011

Director: Jason Eisener

In 2007, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez released *Death Proof* and *Planet Terror* as the double feature *Grindhouse* in the US, complete with lovingly crafted fake trailers for imagined retro schlockfests – Rodriguez's *Machete*, Eli Roth's *Thanksgiving Day*, Edgar Wright's *Don't* and Rob Zombie's *Werewolf Women of the SS*. These highly economic, sensation-crammed parodies were in many ways more memorable than the two main features they accompanied and earned themselves a cult fanbase online. A fake trailer competition arranged that year by Rodriguez at the SXSW Film Festival was won by Canadian Jason Eisener, whose hyperbolic short *Hobo with a Shotgun* went on to be included in the Canadian release of *Grindhouse*. In a move that practically defines exploitation, *Hobo*, *Machete* and the Soska twins' similarly *Grindhouse*-inspired fake trailer for *Dead Hooker in a Trunk* would all be extended into real feature films, cashing in on the reputation of the original fake trailers.

Eisener's story of an itinerant hobo meting out vigilante justice in a corrupted urban environment is an affectionate tribute to the scuzziest back alleys of cinema from a bygone Reagan era, and should appeal to devotees of *The Warriors* (1979), *Escape from New York* (1981), *Class of 1984* (1982), *Savage Streets* (1984), *Street Trash* (1987) and the *Mad Max* sequels. Everything here bears a 1980s imprint, from the lurid primary hues to the synth-heavy score. Naturally the Hobo is played by 80s throwback Rutger Hauer (replacing David Brunt from the original \$150 trailer), and naturally he speaks, as every 'character' does, in overwrought Arnie-isms that are funny precisely for their witlessness. "You make me want to cut my dick off and rub it on your titties," declares an ardent john to hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold Abby (Molly Dunsworth). It is a line that no one would ever say, except in a film like this – which is precisely what lends *Hobo* its rarefied brand of authenticity. Like Scott Sanders's *Black Dynamite* (2009), this comes so very close to what it apes that pinning down exactly where reproduction ends and lampoon begins proves impossible.

Still, while Eisener and his crew are to be admired for painstakingly recreating a certain kind of 1980s sleaze, the result essentially remains cinematic dross – or worse, ersatz dross – while the joke of the original fake trailer has become overstretched. All the best bits of the film – like the paedophile Santa ("I'll come down both your chimneys!") or the surreal, half-glanced spectacle of armoured thugs wrestling a giant octopus – are also the most throwaway. Perhaps that's always the way with trash, whether old or archaising.

◆ Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Rob Cotterill
Niv Fichman
Frank Siracusa
Written by
John Davies
Director of Photography
Kamir Hussain
Edited by
Jason Eisener
Production Designer
Ewen Dickson
Original Music
Darius Holbert
Adam T. Burke
Russ Howard III
The Obsidian Orchestra
Sound Mixer
Zan Rosborough
Costume Designer
Sarah Dunsworth
Stunt Co-ordinator
Michael Langlois

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Nova Scotia Limited
Production Companies
Alliance Films presents
with the participation of
Téléfilm Canada and
Film Nova Scotia a
Rhombus
Media/Whizbang Films
production
A Yer Dead film
Executive Producers
Mark Slone
Victor Loewy

CAST

Rutger Hauer
Hobo
Gregory Smith
Slick
Molly Dunsworth
Abby
Brian Downey
Drake
Nick Bateman
Ivan
Pasha Ebrahimi
bumfight filmmaker
Rob Wells
Logan
Drew O'Hara
Otis
Jeremy Akerman
chief of police
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Momentum Pictures

Holy Rollers

USA 2009

Director: Kevin Asch

Certificate 15 88m 49s

Like its protagonist, *Holy Rollers* seems to be in the throes of an identity crisis, wondering whether to keep things unassuming, mild and conventional, or buck the rules and explore the dark side. There should, after all, be a fair amount of transgressive fun to be had with a story about a cloistered Hasidic Jewish rabbi-in-training who reinvents himself, pre-9/11, as an international drug smuggler. And there should be depth, too, in the analysis of a young man's moral crisis – particularly when he's played by Jesse Eisenberg, an actor who excels at evoking the inner battles between ambition and compassion. Eisenberg's work here (completed prior to his star-making turn in *The Social Network*) is extremely watchable, and he's backed by an able, committed cast – but the strength of the acting doesn't quite compensate for a lack of dynamism in the storytelling. Even though – as that jokey title suggests – some scenes are played for laughs, the dominant atmosphere is muted and earnest, an approach that strands the very slight story with nothing much to hide behind.

The journey of Eisenberg's character Sam Gold is portrayed as a straightforward Faustian morality tale: blatant moral weakness invites a blunt karmic comeuppance. Along the way, bad guys cackle wolfishly, loose women beckon from seething dancefloors, and kind, virtuous friends and family members shake their heads – none of which leaves much space for surprise. It's as if the juxtaposition of Hasidic Jews and druggy clubbers seemed so radical to the filmmakers that they felt the need to even things out by resorting to cliché everywhere else.

When this film comes to life, it's thanks to considered detail in the performances. Eisenberg is great at showing his character in the throes of change: deciding to face up to scary dealers; succumbing to a seduction that he knows is an empty, attention-seeking gesture; reacting with naked gratitude

to an exhortation to pray with a stranger on the street. As in *The Social Network*, he persuasively embodies a twitchy innocent with zero emotional stability and a core of steely ambition. Yet the film fails to convey a sense of Sam being truly lost – by the money, by the lifestyle or by the possibility of sex with dealer's moll Rachel (Ari Graynor). As it is, he simply seems to be drifting, not particularly engaged by either of his lives. Nor does the pull of his religion come across strongly – one years for a little of the fierceness and intellectual rigour of *The Believer* (2001), another fact-based drama about a young man's rejection of Jewish orthodoxy. **Hannah McGill**

CREDITS

Produced by
Dannay A. Abeckaser
Tory Tunnell
Per Melita
Jen Gatien
Written by
Antonio Macia
Director of Photography
Ben Kutchins
Edited by
Suzanne Spangler
Production Designer
Tommaso Ortino
Original Music and Songs by
MJ Mynarski
Sound Designer
Tom Paul
Costume Designer
Jacki Roach

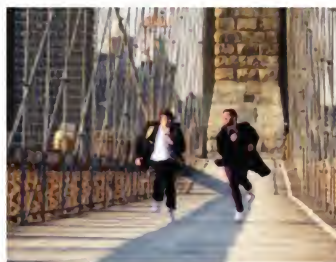
©Holy Rollers Films LLC
Production Companies
Deerjen Films,
Lookbook Films,
Safehouse Pictures and
Gulfstream Films
present
Executive Producers
Kevin Asch
Marat Rosenberg
Isaac Gindi
Dave Berlin

CAST

Jesse Eisenberg
Sam Gold
Justin Bartha
Yosef Zimmerman
Ari Graynor
Rachel Apfel
Dannay A. Abeckaser
Jackie Solomon
Mark Ivanir
Mendel Gold
Elizabeth Marvel
Elka Gold
Jason Fuchs
Leon Zimmerman
Hallie Eisenberg
Ruth Gold
Bern Cohen
Rebbe Horowitz
Stella Keitel
Zelda Lazar
David Vadim
Mr Maxim
Charlie Hewson
Andrew (the goy)
Q-Tip
Ephraim

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Crabtree Films Limited
7993 ft +8 frames



Jesse Eisenberg, Justin Bartha

SYNOPSIS Brooklyn, 1998. Sam Gold, a 20-year-old Hasidic Jew, works in his father's struggling fabric shop. He is beginning rabbinic training, and his family is arranging his marriage to Zelda Lazar. Yosef Zimmerman, the rebellious older brother of Sam's best friend Leon, tells Sam about a job he has importing medicines from Europe and offers to cut him in on the deal. Zelda's parents decide against the marriage; Sam blames this on his family's lack of affluence. He and Leon meet with Yosef's business contact Jackie and undertake an errand collecting pills from Amsterdam. Leon pulls out when he realises that they are smuggling ecstasy, but Sam arranges further trips. He meets Jackie's supplier, and offers business advice; he also gets closer to Jackie's girlfriend Rachel. Jackie involves Sam in recruiting other Jewish smugglers. Sam hears that Zelda is to marry Leon. He is visited by his rabbi, who warns him about his behaviour. Sam's father confronts him; Sam leaves home, and cuts off his peyos. Yosef skims from Jackie's business. On another trip to Amsterdam, Sam kisses Rachel, and clashes with Jackie. He leaves, and at the airport sees some of his young mules getting caught. He tracks Yosef down, tells him what has happened, and goes to see Leon. As he's apologising and asking for help, the police arrive.

Intertitles explain that Sam becomes a government informant and spends 28 days in internment, while Yosef and Jackie serve 16 years. Sam's father is seen visiting him in prison.

Honey

Turkey/Germany 2010

Director: Semih Kaplanoglu

Certificate PG 104m 38s

It is often a matter of fine distinctions – and of viewer sensibility – that determines why some examples of delicate, personal art cinema can be considered the real thing, while others cannot. It is not immediately obvious from a surface description why, for example, Michelangelo Frammartino's recent *Le quattro volte* is a coherent and innovative piece of work while another rural drama, Semih Kaplanoglu's *Honey (Bal)*, despite its slow pacing, detachment and ascetically sparse dialogue, feels not merely academic but also rather softcore.

Kaplanoglu's film – which won last year's Golden Bear in Berlin, triumphing over Alexei Popogrebsky's far more distinctive *How I Ended This Summer* – is the third part of the so-called 'Yusuf Trilogy', which traces the life of its protagonist backwards from adulthood to high school and now to childhood and the traumatic loss of his father.

Not having seen the other two episodes – *Egg* (2007) and *Milk* (2008) – I don't know whether *Honey* is of a piece with them, still less whether it satisfyingly concludes the trilogy. But, starting from its extended opening shot (three and a half minutes, fixed camera), it is apparent that *Honey* is a prime example of the contemplative mode often conveniently referred to as 'Slow Cinema'. In a forest clearing by day, a man emerges with his donkey. Sensing a drip on his shoulder, he identifies it as honey, the substance he's searching for; he climbs a tree with the aid of a rope, but a bough breaks and – in a brilliant mustering of cliffhanger tension over ten shots – the man is left hanging, his eventual fate revealed only at the film's end, following what is essentially an extended flashback.

The use of this opening sequence as a framing device is the most audacious feature of a film that's admirably crafted, evocative and elegant – and yet lacks the steelier vision and observational patience of certain comparable films. Many classic tropes of contemplative rural cinema are present: long static takes; painstaking *mise en scène* including a minutely recreated home environment, notably the sheltering clutter of Yusuf's father's workshop; interiors framed and lit so that women often resemble figures in a Vermeer painting. There is an enigmatic open ending which feels more poetic than narratively conclusive; and a number of episodes that highlight bittersweet ambivalence – in which, for example, crisis and magic come together in the same privileged moment. In one scene, when Yusuf and his father Yakup are walking in a forest, Yakup falls, apparently from epilepsy; just a moment later, Yusuf glimpses a deer framed in the light of a nearby clearing (daylight here often has the golden quality of honey). Similarly, Yusuf's classroom humiliations are depicted with



The sweetest thing: Bora Altas, Erdal Besikcioglu

accompanying ironies: the boy is finally awarded the merit badge he craves, only to learn immediately afterwards that his father has died. Another topos of the cinema of closely observed childhood: the inconsequential accident that becomes all-important from a child's perspective, here the accidental soaking of Yusuf's schoolbooks.

None of this is objectionable, nor feels excessively clichéd; but nor is it very surprising. Certain images, such as the scene in which Yusuf watches his father praying, perhaps feel redundant only because we have seen their like recently in Reha Erdem's superior *Times and Winds* (2006), a rural family drama in a similar Muslim milieu, and a film that transcended its own softer tendencies through the ambitious cosmological sweep of its depiction of nature and the seasons. By comparison, one of *Honey's* images of childhood wonder – the moon reflected in a bucketful of water – fails to transcend its too obvious poetic contrivance.

The film's delicacy and reserve often feel flat and bloodless, and *Honey* largely comes across as a generic example of the 'village childhood' film. By contrast, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's 1997 debut feature *Kasaba*, with its schoolroom scenes remarkably close to the tenor of Kaplanoglu's, was itself borderline generic, yet very distinctively shot and suggestive of unorthodox intelligence, where *Honey* mainly evokes only a Proustian emotional sensitivity. Kaplanoglu effectively conveys the ambivalence of nature as both magical and highly dangerous; but overall the film's mood is too contained and composed, and once past the prologue, *Honey* only really comes alive towards the end, when a sequence at a hillside market brings a welcome burst of quasi-documentary energy.

SYNOPSIS North-east Turkey, the present. Yusuf is the six-year-old son of Yakup, a beekeeper and honey gatherer. Solitary at school, the boy has a stutter, and at home prefers to speak in whispers with Yakup, who teaches him about nature in the mountainous region of Anatolia where they live. Jealous of his father's kindness to rope-maker's son Hamdi, Yusuf swaps his homework with Hamdi's, getting his classmate into trouble; he later visits Hamdi when he is ill. Concerned about her son, Yusuf's mother Zehra has him blessed by an imam. With bees increasingly scarce in the area, Yakup hunts for honey further afield; after several days away, he fails to return. Zehra and Yusuf look for him at a market. Police bring the news that Yakub has died falling from a tree; Yusuf runs off and, following Yakup's tame bird of prey into the forest, spends the night asleep there.

Finally – although one feels horribly churlish in saying this – *Honey* suffers from having a juvenile lead, Bora Altas, whose presence doesn't reward the camera's attention as it might. His half-smiles seem forced, and he often seems to be responding visibly to offscreen direction – notably when turning to look at things. Kaplanoglu has seemingly chosen Altas for his vulnerable reserve rather than more extrovert energies, but the boy lacks the naturalness that makes for truly striking screen presence – and that can sometimes turn small art films into small miracles.

◆ Jonathan Romney

CREDITS

Producer
Semih Kaplanoglu
Screenplay
Semih Kaplanoglu
Orçun Koksak
Director of Photography
Baris Özbiçer
Editing
Ayhan Ergünel
Semih Kaplanoglu
S. Hande Günen
Art Director
Naz Erayda
Sound
Matthias Haeb

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Production &
Heimatfilm GmbH + Co
KG
Production Companies
Kaplan Film Production
and Heimatfilm present
with the support of
Filmstiftung Nordrhein-
Westfalen and
Eurimages in
co-operation with
ZDF/Arte
In co-production with
ZDF
In collaboration with
Arte

CAST

Bora Altas
Yusuf
Erdal Besikcioglu
Yakup
Tülin Özen
Zehra
Alev Uçarer
Ayse Altay
Özkan Akçay
Selami Gökçe
cast members
Kamil Yilmaz
Hamdi's father
Adem Kurkut
Erhan Keskin
policemen
Rasit Altas
Zekeriya, honey seller
Hasan Özgen
Falk, honey seller
Simay Maçça
girl reading poem

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Verve Pictures

9,417 ft +3 frames

Turkish theatrical title
Bal

Huge

United Kingdom 2009

Director: Ben Miller

Certificate 15 78m 6s

"You don't have a funny bone in your body," says Clark, the nerdy half of the comedy double-act that's meant to introduce us to the bruising world of British comedy, from open mics in grimy clubs to coke-fuelled awards after-parties. "You're a birdwatcher, not a bird," he concludes. This statement is directed at Warren, his neurotic and deluded counterpart, but it could just as well be applied to *Huge* itself – and by extension its first-time director, Fringe favourite and TV funnyman Ben Miller, possibly struck by an uncomfortable flash of self-awareness.

You can sense that early in development the idea was to expose the brutality of the comedy circuit via an outsider story à la *Rocky*, showing the gladiator-like physicality of telling jokes in front of audiences who'd rather laugh at you than with you. Sadly, the film never finds its tone, brusquely switching from the close-to-the-bone naturalism of *Peep Show* (though, alas, never as droll or cutting as that C4 series) to cringe-inducing pseudo-surrealism (Warren tracking down Clark thanks to a lost shoe, just like Cinderella). *Huge* has the feel of a shelved TV pilot: subpar cinematography, inept editing, disconcerting 'gags' and incredibly flat dialogue (where are the jokes? Aren't they comedians?). Nothing works.

Ultimately the film's most glaring flaw lies in its leading duo, not so much mismatched as entirely miscast. Noel Clarke sheds his tough bruv image in an attempt to reproduce adorable Richard Ayoade geekiness to portray the innocent Clark, but remains desperately bland when not plain charmless, whereas Johnny Harris unsuitably displays the same degree of menacing intensity seen in his performance as the rapist dad in *This Is England '86*, rendering Warren not so much a sad clown as a mentally ill one. Their would-be modern Morecambe and Wise are neither appealing nor likeable and never witty,

SYNOPSIS London, the present. Warren, a lifelong fan of Morecambe and Wise, is desperate to make it as a professional comedian. During his first open-mic performance, restaurant waiter Clark rudely interrupts him before joining him on stage to improvise a knock-knock joke at his expense. Warren is convinced they would make a great double-act and persuades Clark to move in with him so that they can start writing together.

After a string of rejections from promoters and thwarted performances on the capital's stand-up circuit, they decide to crash the Comedy Awards after-party to make contacts. They meet Kris, an American agent who introduces them to cocaine. Warren reacts badly to the drug and ends up in hospital; later, back at the flat, he spends his days in bed, depressed and ready to abandon his dream.

One day Clark returns home after spending the afternoon trying his jokes out on picnickers at the local park, and discovers that Warren has gone. Fearing the worst, Clark looks for Warren everywhere, eventually finding him performing solo at a club. He is outraged by his friend's betrayal.

A year passes. Clark is now a successful comedian. Unexpectedly, Warren visits him on the set of an ad he's filming. Warren is disappointed with the direction Clark's career has taken, and implies that he's sold out. Nevertheless, Warren asks Clark to rekindle their partnership for a special show. Clark angrily refuses, but is present on the night to perform his knock-knock joke one more time.



Larging it: Michelle Ryan

which makes it incredibly hard to care. You end up rooting for the promoter who asks them to "come back when you're funny". ◆ Guillaume Gendron

CREDITS

Produced by
Rebecca Farhall
Colin Jones
Screenplay
Ben Miller
Simon Godley
Based on the play
written by Jez
Butterworth, Ben Miller,
Simon Godley
Director of Photography
Trevor Forrest
Editor
Richard Graham
Production Designer
Kristian Milsted
Music
Christian Henson
Sound Designer
Martin Cantwell
Costume Designer
Fiona Chilcott

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Production Companies
A Toft Media production
in association with
Matador Pictures, Hat
Trick Productions,
Cinema Three and
Regent Capital and
Fortunous Films
Executive Producers
Nigel Thomas
Charlotte Walls
Jimmy Mulville
Phil Hope

CAST

Noel Clarke
Clark
Johnny Harris
Warren
Oliver Chris
Darren
Michelle Ryan
Cindy
Tamsin Egerton
Clarisse
Russell Tovey
Carl
Rasmus Hardiker
Josh
Ralph Brown
Neil
Thandie Newton
Kris
Liz Daniels
Mrs Tomaszewski
Craig Miller
Cruddy JJ
Jonathan Hopwood
Cruddy Muzz

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Independent
Distribution Limited

7029 ft +0 frames



Jack Black-belt: 'Kung Fu Panda 2'

Kung Fu Panda 2

USA 2011

Director: Jennifer Yuh Nelson

Certificate PG 90m 24s

Feature animations are now far less condescended to than they used to be, but 2008's *Kung Fu Panda* is probably still underestimated. While it may not quite belong in the top rank dominated by Pixar's *Toy Story* series, *Up!*, *Ratatouille* and *WALL-E*, its tale of a panda fulfilling his unlikely destiny as a hero of kung fu was stunningly designed and choreographed – a family animation that doubled as a love letter to the balletic grace of live-action wuxia films, mixing *Kung Fu Hustle*'s rapid-fire slapstick with epic set pieces worthy of Zhang Yimou. The escape of villain Tai Lung from a prison deep inside a mountain is as majestically orchestrated as any action sequence I've seen; the interlude in which Po, the hugely

rotund hero, battles his tiny tutor Master Shifu over a bowl of dumplings, armed only with chopsticks, plays delightfully with the different weight and poise of its characters.

Is the sequel as good? Almost. It's disappointing if not surprising that *Kung Fu Panda 2* opts for the safest of Hollywood sequel strategies: amplification. Bigger, louder, faster; Po must travel further, fight more enemies and in more epic settings. An aristocratic peacock, Lord Shen (well voiced by Gary Oldman), has developed deadly artillery capable of defeating even the most formidable kung-fu masters. Po must overcome this weapon and liberate Gongmen City – but only if he can first find inner peace, which means coming to terms with the fate of his parents, lost in his infancy.

With Guillermo Del Toro involved as executive producer (not to mention Charlie Kaufman as uncredited script consultant), more sparks of originality might have been expected. But in one sense *Kung Fu Panda 2* improves on the original: Po must leave his safe home to venture into danger, making for a more

traditionally satisfying quest narrative, where the original at times trod water waiting for his nemesis to turn up and fight (a nemesis that then turned out to be, literally, a big pussycat).

One thing *Kung Fu Panda 2* fails to amplify is the charm of the first. The comedy doesn't just reprise the same ideas – Po as kung-fu fanboy dazzled by his childhood heroes the Furious Five; Po as lazy, greedy, physically hapless until called upon to save a village – but at times even seems to reprise old lines. That said, the execution by director Jennifer Yuh Nelson – remarkably only the first woman to take charge of a major studio animation – is superb, from a battle scene in a collapsing tower to a rickshaw race which resists the temptation to become simply a 3D rollercoaster ride.

Just as the first film set up the second by leaving Po's birth a mystery, the second sets up the third with a final revelation on the same subject. Perhaps *Kung Fu Panda 3* will see Po take on the greatest challenge for any panda – starting a family. **Sam Davies**

CREDITS

Produced by Melissa Cobb
Written by Jonathan Aibel
Glenn Berger
Editor Clare Knight
Production Designer Raymond Zibach
Music Hans Zimmer
John Powell
Supervising Sound Editors Ethan Van der Ryn
Erik Aadahl
Head of Character Animation Dan Wagner

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Production Company DreamWorks Animation
SKG

VOICE CAST

Jack Black Po
Angelina Jolie Tigress
Dustin Hoffman Shifu

Gary Oldman Shen
Seth Rogen Mantis
Lucy Liu Viper
David Cross Crane
James Hong Mr Ping
Michelle Yeoh soothsayer
Danny McBride wolf boss
Dennis Haysbert Master Storming Ox
Jean-Claude Van Damme Master Croc
Victor Garber Master Rhino
Jackie Chan Monkey

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDS
In Colour Prints by Technicolor
[1.85:1]
3D

Distributor Paramount Pictures UK
8,136 ft +0 frames

Larry Crowne

USA/France 2011

Director: Tom Hanks

Certificate 12A 98m 37s

The poster for *Larry Crowne* shows Julia Roberts riding on the back of Tom Hanks's scooter, her hair flying in the wind. The film itself actually sees her character Mercedes grudgingly wearing a safety helmet as Larry (Hanks), one of her adult-education students, pootles along at a slow, careful pace. This scene sums up *Larry Crowne* nicely: it is middle-aged and it is safe.

Ex-navy chef Larry is a dull divorcee who does what he's told: having lost his supermarket job he signs up for college classes at a neighbour's suggestion, and readily submits to a makeover of both his image and his home at the hands of new young friend Talia, allowing her to throw out any of his possessions. In this scrubbed-up version of the modern world (penned by director Hanks with Nia Vardalos, who also appears in the film), Talia belongs to a scooter gang whose members merely ride around looking for a bite to eat, while Mercedes is said to have a drink habit but becomes almost incapacitated after three cocktails.

The broad theme is a tussle between old and young, between tradition and technology. Shakespeare fan Mercedes is jealous of Talia, a frequent text-messenger who encourages Larry to wear youthful clothes, and she despises the internet, mainly because it's the instrument of her husband's perceived porn habit. But when Talia opts to run a vintage clothing store, it seems that tradition has won – a message underscored by the inevitable union between Mercedes and Larry.

There's little to like about Mercedes, even if she does draw a few laughs ("Are you clairvoyant?" she asks dryly after a student promises she'll love his presentation). Like Larry, her character is drawn with clumsy brushstrokes and awkward expository conversations. The plodding narrative offers them little chance for improvement or empowerment – merely a love match that may be marginally better than their previous ones.

There are gentle laughs here and there, mostly courtesy of the scene-stealing Wilmer Valderrama as Talia's boyfriend. But as Larry scoots between one uninteresting world and another, his destination feels obvious and the structure tired. Without the weight of Hanks behind it, it's very easy to

imagine this as a small-screen daytime movie – which may be where it finds its natural home.

Anna Smith

Julia Roberts



CREDITS

Produced by
Tom Hanks
Gary Goetzman
Written by
Tom Hanks
Nia Vardalos
Director of Photography
Philippe Rousselot
Editor
Alan Cody
Production Designer
Victor Kempster
Music
James Newton Howard
Sound Mixer
John Pritchett
Costume Designer
Albert Wolosky

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Production Companies
Universal Pictures and Vendôme Pictures present a Playtone production
A Tom Hanks Film
Executive Producers
Steven Shreshian
David Coatsworth
Philippe Rousselet
Jeb Brody
Fabrice Gianfermi

CAST

Tom Hanks
Larry Crowne
Julia Roberts
Mercedes Tainot

Bryan Cranston
Dean Tainot
Cedric The Entertainer
Lamar
Taraji P. Henson
B'ella
Gugu Mbatha-Raw
Talia
Wilmer Valderrama
Dell Gordo
Pam Grier
Frances
Rita Wilson
Dell Gordo
George Takei
Dr Matsutani
Rob Riggie
Jack Strang
Ian Gomez
Frank

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
Colour/Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

8,875 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title
Il n'est jamais trop tard

Last Night

USA/France 2009

Director: Massy Tadjedin

Certificate 12A 92m 46s

Set over the course of a single night, Massy Tadjedin's feature debut is the story of what happens when a marriage starts to grow up. Joanna and Michael, a young couple living an improbably bourgeois life in New York, are both tempted to stray – she by a chance encounter with an old flame, he by the allure of a workplace fling. Exploring the two extramarital encounters in parallel, the film offers an in-depth portrait of a relationship under stress.

Theatrical in both structure and style, using long takes and limited (mostly interior) locations, the film echoes most obviously 2004's *Closer*, which focused with similar intensity on infidelity among a small group of young urbanites. But whereas *Closer* was interested in the drama engendered by relationship cross-pollination, *Last Night* takes a more intimate standpoint, focusing on the reasons for, rather than the consequences of, infidelity.

The three relationships (Joanna and Michael, Joanna and ex-boyfriend Alex, Michael and work colleague Laura) develop slowly and subtly as the story unfolds, while an attention to detail strengthens the realism of the onscreen world by evoking a sense of domesticity and routine. Notably, just as on a theatre stage, anything that is displaced or used in a given scene (plates, cutlery, a stack of magazines, a pair of shoes) is later shown being replaced or cleaned away.

Though this is satisfying, the lack of chemistry between all three couples draws attention to the restricted focus and slow pace, making the film feel much longer than it is. Even the most overtly erotic of the pairings – the encounter between Michael and Laura in that most cinematically coded of settings, the hotel bar – is at times awkward, and at others boring. Keira Knightley is good as displaced, dissatisfied young wife Joanna, but ultimately plays her too cold, so that it becomes difficult to accept the simmering passion her louche Parisian ex-boyfriend supposedly ignites. Though he starts out as an intriguingly exotic injection into the story, French *amant* Alex is also flattened by the pair's failure to connect.

Casting missteps are all the more disappointing since there is much about that film that works. Dialogue, for the most part, is sharp and smart, while an improvised feel to group scenes brings both energy and credibility.

SYNOPSIS New York, present day. Michael goes on a business trip with his attractive colleague Laura, leaving his suspicious wife Joanna at home. The same morning, Joanna bumps into ex-boyfriend Alex, who is visiting from Paris. That evening, Alex and Joanna have dinner, then go to a party with Alex's friends (and Joanna's neighbour's dog, which she has agreed to walk). Meanwhile Michael and Laura have a business dinner, then continue drinking together at the hotel bar before finally ending up in bed. Realising that they still love one another, Joanna and Alex kiss. She refuses to take things further but they spend the night in his hotel room before Alex leaves early the next morning for Paris. Joanna goes home, arriving moments before Michael. Michael suspects that his wife has been out all night but says nothing.



Cold light of dawn: Keira Knightley

The parallel development of the two 'illicit' relationships keeps things moving and is neatly punctuated by intimate scenes between Joanna and Michael. Intelligent and probing, the film offers up a careful examination of the psychology of relationships, but is let down by its failure to build a convincing rapport between characters.

❖ Chloe Roddick

CREDITS

Producers
Nick Wechsler
Massy Tadjedin
Sidonie Dumas
Screenplay
Massy Tadjedin
Cinematography
Peter Deming
Editor
Susan E. Morse
Production Designer
Tim Grimes
Composer
Clint Mansell
Sound Engineer
Darryl Michael
Costume Designer
Ann Roth

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Production Companies
Miramax Films and Gaumont present a Nick Wechsler, Westbourne, Gaumont production
Executive Producers
Christophe Riandee
Buddy Enright

CAST

Keira Knightley
Joanna
Sam Worthington
Michael
Guillaume Canet
Alex
Eva Mendes
Laura
Daniel Eric Gold
Andy
Scott Adsit
Stuart
Griffin Dunne
Truman
Stephanie Romanov
Sandra
Anson Mount
Neal
Justine Cotsionas
Maggie
Karen Pittman
Caroline

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

8,348 ft +12 frames

The Light Thief

Germany/France/

The Netherlands/Kyrgyzstan 2010

Director: Aktan Arym Kubat

The Light Thief is Kyrgyz actor/writer/director Aktan Arym Kubat's fifth feature, so its rambling structure and woody storyline can't be put down to inexperience – nor can its abrupt, unheralded last-act lurch from bucolic comedy into violent tragedy. Such blithe indifference to conventional narrative coherence would seem to be intentional – a conclusion borne out by Kubat's own stated artistic credo: "I don't shoot my films strictly according to the screenplay, but rely on my intuition, casual foresight and some inexplicable miracle to happen. Live streams of life sometimes dictate such plots that can't be thought out in an office... These moments can't be reconstructed, they can only be captured." The same presumably goes for the occasional interpolated nocturnal shots of donkeys trotting, cavorting or rutting which punctuate the action.

Without a wider knowledge of Kyrgyz culture it's hard to tell whether this approach reflects the national style of storytelling or whether it's particular to Kubat himself. Realism evidently isn't a priority, though there are clear hints of a satirical intent – not least because of frequent references, in conversation or on TV screens, to the downfall of Askar Akayev, first president of an independent Kyrgyzstan, who was overthrown in the Tulip Revolution of 2005. Parallels with the rise to power, via corruption and brutality, of the film's chief heavy, local developer Bekzat, aren't hard to trace.

Still, if you're not too worried by a story that lurches every which way – rather like the film's hero, maverick electrician Svet-ake, drunkenly bemoaning the fact that his wife has given him only daughters and begging his macho friend Mansur to impregnate her with a son – there are some intriguing glimpses of Kyrgyz village life, from the tall mitre-like hats of decorated papier-mâché worn by the tribal elders on formal occasions to the evidently popular game of goat-grabbing. (In this, jostling horsemen lean down from the saddle and try to snatch up a young goat that's had its feet tied together. One hopes it was dead before the tournament started.) And when Svet-ake is struck down by a massive dose of current from an overhead cable, the villagers unhesitatingly revive him by burying him up to his neck in the ground.

Svet-ake, played by Kubat himself, is portrayed as a classic loveable rogue with a touch of Robin Hood about him. Accused by the head of the power company of helping his neighbours steal electricity, he responds that he only does it for those who can't afford to pay – though this seems to include just



Pole star: Aktan Arym Kubat

about everyone in the village. The overall impression left by the film is of a country where, through inclination or necessity, everyone from the highest to the humblest is on the fiddle. But

while types like Akayev and Bekzat are only out for themselves, Svet-ake at least brings light – which perhaps makes him a fallen angel of sorts.

◆ Philip Kemp

CREDITS

Producers

Altynai Koichumanova
Cedomir Kolar
Thanassis Karathanos
Marc Baschet
Karl Baumgartner
Denis Vasin

Screenplay

Aktan Arym Kubat
Talip Ibrahimov

Director of

Photography
Hasan Kydyraliyev

Editor

Petar Markovic

Production Design

Talgat Asyranikulov

Music

André Matthias

Sound

Bekyt Niyazaliev

Costume Design

Inara Abdieva

Production

Companies

Pallas Film, A.S.A.P.
Films, Volya Films, Oy
Art in co-production
with ZDF/Arte
With the support of
Mitteldeutsche
Medienförderung.

Fonds Sud Cinéma,
World Cinema Fund,
Hubert Bals Fund, The
Netherlands Film Fund

CAST

Aktan Arym Kubat

Svet-ake

Taalaikan Abazova

Bermet

Askat Sulaimanov

Bekzat

Asan Amanov

Esen

Stanbek Toichubaev

Mansur

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Kyrgyz theatrical title
Svet-ake

Poetry

Republic of Korea/France 2010

Director: Lee Chang-Dong

For 'poetry', of course, read 'cinema'. Lee Chang-Dong is hardly the first filmmaker to send a protagonist on a journey of discovery that changes their perception of the world, but no one's ever put a sixtiesomething granny in the early stages of Alzheimer's through an adult-education poetry class as a way of crafting a social statement about a self-absorbed patriarchy's paucity of human insight. We watch and learn – about South Korea certainly, but about ourselves too – though this never becomes a duty, since Lee's enviable level of accomplishment seemingly precludes didacticism. Here's a filmmaker with a conscience, that's for sure, but one who deploys it in an astringent challenge to our assumptions rather than sentimental pandering. Lee is esteemed at home and on the festival circuit (he's a regular in competition at Cannes), but this is the first of his five features to secure UK theatrical distribution. It's fair to say that the subject-matter, encompassing poetry, dementia, sexual abuse and suicide, is likely to be a hard sell, but the quality of the film is such that it simply demands an airing.

From the socially maladjusted ex-con finding a soulmate in a young woman with cerebral palsy (*Oasis*, 2002) to the everyman rejecting the roles of soldier, policeman and businessman thrust upon him by Korea's recent history (*Peppermint Candy*, 1999) and the unmarried handyman unrequitedly devoted to a young widow whose life is subsumed by tragedy (*Secret Sunshine*, 2007), the subjects of Lee's films are people who can't or won't accede to what's expected of them. Here the elderly Mija reacts to news of her irreversible Alzheimer's by signing up for a poetry class. She's losing her words (even everyday ones like 'electricity' and 'wallet'), so why even enter an arena that's about shaping enhanced perceptions through the skilled command of language? In essence, that's the puzzle which drives the story forward, as the viewer tries to make connections between this poetic thread and the unfolding dilemma whereby the old lady is inveigled into coming up with her share of the blood-money being raised by the fathers of the teenage boys (her surly grandson Wook among them) whose rape of their high-school classmate Hee-jin drove the poor girl to drown herself.

Leading lady Yun Jung-Hee, a Korean screen legend who emerged from 16 years of retirement to provide the latest in a series of truly remarkable female performances in Lee's filmography, proves uncannily adept at showing how Mija's ostensibly benign floral-print-wearing dottiness masks a strength of will intensifying by the day. After capriciously walking out of the men's self-important pow-wow, the manner in which she comes up with the dosh turns the power and



Ode joy: Yoon Jeong-Hee

influence of machismo back on itself in a highly pointed manner.

Lee's film isn't exactly over-plotted yet this worm-that-turns narrative plays out to compelling effect, largely because it leaves us to piece together Mija's motives and methods. In what is an effective counterpoint to Bong Joon-Ho's *Mother* (where the social observation stems from the matriarch's determination to deny her slow-witted son's guilt in a murder case), Lee never seems to be pushing too hard, his unshowy formal technique relying on a characteristic facility for thoroughly convincing blocking of the performers, so it often appears as if the camera has simply wandered into some already ongoing real-life confrontation. The results are disarmingly powerful, and not just in the way we come to sense how Mija's misadventures with the local poetry-appreciation society – frequently hijacked by men egotistically parading their would-be sensitivity – effectively dovetail with the rape storyline by highlighting the male sense of entitlement seemingly running through every layer of Korean society. Lee is astute enough not to make all the men unsympathetic, but we take the point that Mija's opening up to a deeper understanding of her place in the world is a touching if belated act of resistance against the prevailing notion that the world doesn't belong to women like her but to the sort of men who can buy their way out of justice.

At which point Lee finds another gear not otherwise present in his work to date, shifting out of a register of combative Imamura-esque social engagement into an even more – yes – poetic realm of expression. Mija's endeavours culminate in an all-consuming identification with the suicide victim Hee-jin, setting up a closing gesture of transcendence achieved through Mija's written words and Lee's images of running water. Somehow it's at once a moment of liberating individual release and a bleak recognition of an intransigent status quo, and it lifts what is already a rich and compassionate film into something approaching greatness.

◆ Trevor Johnston

SYNOPSIS Kok-Moinok, a village in southern Kyrgyzstan, 2005. Svet-ake ('Mr Light') is an electrician, popular with the locals because he wires up their meters to run backwards. The head of the power company is not amused; despite the intervention of Svet-ake's friend Esen, who is the village mayor, the power-company boss has Svet-ake arrested. Svet-ake's wife Bermet vainly tries to prevent the arrest. When Svet-ake is released he goes back to his previous activities. In his spare time he builds a windmill in his yard which he hopes will generate current. Climbing up to some overhead cables he gets struck by electricity, but is revived by his friends.

Bekzat, a rich landowner, is trying to buy political influence to further his development plans. Esen warns the village elders against him. Getting drunk with his friend Mansur, Svet-ake bemoans his lack of sons. News reports on TV show riots in the capital against the corrupt regime of President Akayev. Bekzat recruits Mansur as his aide and starts handing out bribes. He gains Svet-ake's allegiance by showing interest in his plan to build a wind farm to provide power for the village. Esen dies, and Mansur succeeds him as mayor.

Bekzat brings in a group of potential Chinese investors and gives a feast for them in a specially constructed yurt. A village girl, whose grandmother is a friend of Svet-ake's, is brought in to dance and strip for the visitors. Bekzat tells them she will have sex with a camel, unless they would prefer to have sex with her themselves. Outraged, Svet-ake disrupts the show. The next day he is hunted down by a trio of horsemen, beaten up and drowned in the river. The windmill in his yard starts turning for the first time.

CREDITS

Producer
Lee Joon-Dong
Screenplay
Lee Chang-Dong
Director of Photography
Kim Hyunseok
Editor
Kim Hyun
Art Director
Sihn Jeomhui
Sound Recordist
Lee Seungchul
Costume Designer
Lee Choongyeon

©UniKorea Culture & Art Investment Co. Ltd. and Pinehouse Film Production Companies
UniKorea presents in association with Diaphana Distribution, NEW, KTB Capital and KT Capital a Pinehouse Film production
Executive Producers
Youn Taesoon
Choi Seongmin

CAST

Yoon Jung-Hee
Yang Mija
David Lee
Wook
Kim Hira
Mr Kang
Ahn Nae-Sang
Kibum's father

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
ICA/Arrow Film Distributors Ltd

Korean theatrical title
Shi



The royal oui: Mélanie Thierry, Gaspard Ulliel

The Princess of Montpensier

France/Germany 2010
Director: Bertrand Tavernier
Certificate 15 139m 42s

Madame de Lafayette's anonymously published *The Princess of Montpensier* (1662), like the better known *The Princess of Cleves* (1678), tells a tale of a young bartered bride, a woman thrown into the world of French court life who finds herself torn between the pragmatism of a dutiful marriage and the thrill of illicit passions. As an early example of what would come to be recognised as the 'psychological novel', exploring the inner life of a woman rather than the derring-do of the romantic heroes who surround her, the tale seems well suited to adaptation by veteran filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier, a director renowned for his attention to the emotional and social complexities of character. Marie de Montpensier is a product of an era when women were the property of fathers and husbands, and when failure to conform to the rule of patriarchy meant disgrace and exile. A famed beauty, Marie finds herself the object of extreme passions, negotiating her way through the admiration, devotion, jealousy and lust she inspires. Sometimes resolute and decisive, at other times foolish and naive, Marie ultimately succumbs to her passion for a scoundrel, and loses everything in the process.

As a period drama, the film has many merits: swashbuckling set pieces in castle courtyards and on the battlefield, sexual shenanigans in corridors and boudoirs, and formal decorative episodes in the form of weddings and masked balls. The casting of predominantly young actors in the principal roles reinforces the film's narrative of a generation of children in transit from innocence to corrupted adulthood, while Lambert Wilson in the role of tutor and confidant Chabannes shows a gravitas which suggests the wisdom and disillusionment that come with age. Mélanie Thierry as Marie is a

beauty of the English-rose variety, an object of desire entirely capable of rousing passion and rivalry among France's menfolk. But while the novel anchors Marie's character in an irresistible lifelong passion for the charismatic Henri de Guise, the film paints her as having all the constancy of mind of a hormonal teenager, resolving to love, reject, flirt or scheme as the mood seemingly takes her. Thus her inability to resist the increasingly fanatical Guise is as irritating as his predictable rejection of her. Indeed,

it's hard to find any great tragedy in Tavernier's story of lost virtue, and hard to care much about the nunnery fate that must await this capricious woman. For a cast of characters apparently caught up in a maelstrom of obsessive love, there is simply not enough chemistry to convince us of their passion: Chabannes is too ponderous, Montpensier too petulant, Guise too self-absorbed. And instead of a woman with emotional depth, Marie comes across as superficial and wilfully fickle. **Sue Harris**

CREDITS

Producer
Eric Heumann
Written by
Jean Cosmos
François Olivier Rousseau
Bertrand Tavernier
Based on the story by Madame de Lafayette
Dialogue
Jean Cosmos
Director of Photography
Bruno de Keyser
Editor
Sophie Brunet
Art Director
Guy-Claude François
Original Music
Philippe Sarde
Sound
Oliver Schwob
Elisabeth Paquotte
Oliver Dô-Huô
Costume Designer
Caroline de Vivaise
Fight Co-ordinator
Alain Figlarz

©Paradis Films, StudioCanal, France 2

Cinéma, France 3
Cinéma, Pandora
Filmproduktion
Production Companies
Eric Heumann presents a Paradis Films, StudioCanal, France 2
Cinéma, France 3
Cinéma, Pandora
Filmproduktion co-production
With the participation of Canal +, CinéCinéma, France Télévisions, Sofica Cinéma 4, Sofica Banque Postale Image 3, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication/French Ministry of Culture and Communication, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée and FFA - Filmförderungsanstalt
Associate producer: Outsider Productions
With the support of Région Auvergne and Centre Images - Région Centre
A film by Bertrand

Tavernier
With the support of Centre Images - Région Centre, Commission du Film d'Auvergne, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée and MEDIA Programme of the European Community
In association with Cinéma 4 and Banque Postale Image 3
Executive Producer
Frédéric Bourboulon

CAST

Mélanie Thierry
Marie de Montpensier
Lambert Wilson
François de Chabannes
Gaspard Ulliel
Henri de Guise
Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet
Philippe de Montpensier
Raphaël Personnaz
Duc d'Anjou
Michel Vuillermoz
Duc de Montpensier
Philippe Magnan
Marquis de Mézières

Florence Thomassin
Marquise de Mézières
Judith Chemla
Catherine de Guise
Jean-Pol Dubois
Cardinal de Lorraine
Christine Brucher
Duchesse de Montpensier
Evelina Meghnagi
Catherine de Médicis

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

12,573 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
La Princesse de Montpensier
Onscreen English subtitle
Princess of Montpensier

SYNOPSIS France, 1562, during the Wars of Religion. Beautiful young heiress Marie de Mézières learns that she is to be married to the Prince of Montpensier as part of an alliance between their two families. She reluctantly accepts her fate and develops some affection for her young husband; however, she remains drawn to her childhood sweetheart, the ambitious Henri de Guise. While the prince goes off to battle for the Duke of Anjou, Marie is left at Champigny, the remote family home, in the care of Montpensier's former tutor and mentor Chabannes. When peace is declared, Marie is presented at court in Paris, where her relationship with Guise is rekindled and her marriage to the prince comes under strain. Chabannes, clearly in love with her too, tries to advise and protect her, but incurs the wrath of the prince and is dismissed from his service. Killed shortly afterwards, Chabannes leaves Marie a letter warning her not to trust Guise. Nevertheless, Marie abandons her marriage for Guise, and declares her passion to him on the eve of his own marriage to a rich noblewoman. He rejects her. Humiliated and in disgrace, Marie withdraws from life, probably to a convent.

The Round Up

France/Germany/Hungary 2010
Director: Rose Bosch

Criticisms of dramas concerned with the Holocaust are well rehearsed. It has been argued, after Adorno, that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbarism; that masterworks such as *Schindler's List* reduce individual experience to archetypes of suffering; that fictionalisations such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* exploit real trauma for theatrical tragedy; and that the greatest examinations of the Holocaust are to be found in documentaries by the likes of Resnais and Ophüls, directors who allow history to speak for itself. Rose Bosch's meticulously researched *The Round Up* occupies a strange position vis-à-vis these debates: based entirely on the personal testimonies of real-life victims of World War II's atrocities, the film aims to use fiction to show a reality that documentary cannot capture.

Every incident in *The Round Up* is an evocation of an eye-witness account of events that took place in France during the summer of 1942, when more than 13,000 Jewish people living in Paris were forcibly removed from their homes and herded into the Vélodrome d'Hiver sports stadium. Since the individual accounts are often incomplete, the film skips between characters, building up fragments to make a whole. We follow among others a young Jewish boy living with his Polish parents in Montmartre; a protestant nurse volunteering at the Vélodrome; a firefighter summoned to the building for crowd control. Scenes of Hitler are based on Eva Braun's home movies, conversations between Maréchal Pétain and Prime Minister Pierre Laval on recorded transcripts.

The ethical commitment to authenticity underpinning the film also spills over into the camerawork: for the most part, Bosch eschews stylised cinematography and relies on shots that reflect the point of view of each witness, the notable exception being a vertiginous crane shot of the Vélodrome's interior which allows a brief, nauseating glimpse at the scale of the horror. And yet certain creative decisions still cause discomfort. The postcard-perfect Montmartre setting which opens the film and the breathtakingly attractive cast (the children in particular are almost physically perfect) are overly aesthetic, as if the director doesn't trust her audience to be moved by an ugly Jew.

Bosch's film has been a huge box-office success in France, where it has been seen by more than three million people, and it's not hard to see why. Admittedly, it's a little didactic (Bosch goes heavy on the ironic juxtapositions of naive Jews and the officials who will betray them). But this is a film that sets out to stir audiences, and in so doing to educate them about events of 70 years ago. One might well ask whether contemporary audiences really need any more education about the Holocaust. *The Round Up*, however,



A history of violence: Jean Reno, Gad Elmaleh, Denis Menochet

is less concerned with the Nazi atrocities with which we are all so horribly familiar and more with French complicity in them. As the first film to tackle the July 1942 round-up head on, it thus sits alongside films such as Rachid Bouchareb's *Days of Glory* (2006) and *Outside the Law* (2010) as a cinematic exposé of shameful events in French history.

For domestic audiences, *The Round Up*'s greatest revelation will not be

the fact that children too were bundled into those ghastly death-trains, but that it was their own government who traded them like cattle for greater police control. One can't help but wonder, though, whether despite – indeed perhaps because of – its polish, workmanship and evident sincerity, international audiences might see Bosch's film as just one more Holocaust heritage film.

✦ Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Produced by
Ilan Goldman
Written by
Rose Bosch
Director of Photography
David Ungaro
Editor
Yann Malcor
Art Director
Olivier Racoux
Original Music
Composed by
Christian Henson
Sound Recording
Laurent Zeilig
Costumes
Gilles Bodu-Lemoine

©Légende, Légende Films, Gaumont, Légende des Siècles, TFI Films Production.

France 3 Cinéma, SMTS, KS2 Cinéma, Alva Films, EOS Entertainment, Eurofilm Bis
Production Companies
Légende and Gaumont present a co-production of Légende, Légende Films, Gaumont, Légende des Siècles, TFI Films Production, France 3 Cinéma, SMTS, KS2 Cinéma, Alva Films, EOS Entertainment, Eurofilm Bis
With the participation of Canal+, CinéCinéma, TFI and France Télévisions
Executive Producer
Marc Vadé

CAST

Jean Reno
Doctor David Scheinbaum
Mélanie Laurent
Annette Monod
Gad Elmaleh
Schmuel Weismann
Raphaëlle Agogué
Sura Weismann
Hugo Leverdez
Jo Weismann
Mathieu Di Concetto
Roman Di Concetto
Nono 'Noe' Zygler
Olivier Cywie
Simon Zygler
Adèle Exarchopoulos
Anna Traube
Rebecca Marder
Rachel Weismann
Charlotte Driesen
Charlotte Weismann

Sylvie Testud
Bella Zygler
Joseph Weismann
elderly gentleman
Roland Copé
Marshal Pétain

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

French theatrical title
La Rafle.

SYNOPSIS Paris, summer of 1942. France is occupied by German forces. Eleven-year-old Joseph Weismann and his friend Simon Zygler are forced to wear yellow stars on their clothes, but otherwise their life is untroubled. However, the Vichy government is negotiating with the Nazis to hand over the Jewish population of France in exchange for complete control of the French police. An agreement is reached on 2 July, and on the night of 16 July the apartment block where Joseph and Simon live with their families is stormed by police. The residents are rounded up and taken to the Vélodrome d'Hiver. Simon's eldest sister escapes with the baby of the family, but his pregnant mother and younger brother Nono do not.

Protestant nurse Annette Monod arrives at the Vélodrome to assist Jewish doctor David Scheinbaum in caring for the 13,000 Jews crammed inside with little water and no food. She meets Nono, and another nurse informs her that Madame Zygler has died of a haemorrhage. David and Annette help a young woman to escape the Vélodrome with stolen papers.

Having become attached to Nono (and to David), Annette volunteers to accompany the families on their transfer to Beaune-la-Rolande, a camp some 90 miles outside Paris. They are held there until the authorities announce that the adults are to be dispatched to 'work camps' in Poland; the children must remain behind. As she leaves, Joseph's mother encourages him to escape the camp. He does so, but leaves behind Simon, who has developed a hernia, and Nono.

The order is given that the remaining children should join their parents in the east. Annette learns from a local doctor that they are all in fact being sent to their deaths, but the knowledge comes too late for her to prevent their train leaving.

After the war, Annette is reunited with Joseph, who has been adopted, and Nono, who was found at the side of a railway track. None of the other children ever returned.

Sawako Decides

Japan 2010
Director: Ishii Yuya

Sawako Decides is such fun, so winningly droll, that it's easy to overlook how smart it is. At a time when the huge majority of Japanese indie features focus on me-generation anomie and lack even the least glimmering of political awareness, this is a movie which brings back the spirit of such iconoclasts as Imamura Shohei and Okamoto Kihachi. It satirises the chronic passivity of 'average' Japanese, kicks the shit out of sentimental visions of working-class life and offers a remarkably fresh take on female empowerment. Better yet, its comedy is rooted in plot symmetries and visual parallels, which means that it never needs to descend to farce or slapstick to raise a smile. It's the first Japanese movie in more than 40 years to contain the words "Down with the government" – and it has them sung, with appropriate vehemence, by a gang of tough old women working in a clam-packing factory.

Sawako (gaily played by Mitsushima Hikari, hitherto not known for anything at all offbeat) is a 23-year-old who ran away to Tokyo with a stupid boyfriend when she caught her widower father canoodling with a woman employee. Home was a lakeside village some way outside Tokyo, and the family business was freshwater-clam packing. Aimless, unambitious and quick to accept criticism from colleagues, she has a joyless job with a seriously unpleasant boss in a toy company. She drinks too much, has colonic irrigation once a week, and is in an unpromising relationship with the divorced Arai, who wants her to be a surrogate mother to his infant daughter. Arai is even more hopeless than Sawako herself: devoted to knitting, he fancies himself as a 'new-age' thinker and earnestly recycles. Sawako's default position is her watchword: "It can't be helped."

The plot kicks in when Sawako leaves Tokyo to return to her home village, summoned by her heavy-drinking uncle (it runs in the family) to minister to her dying father and rescue the failing clam-packing business. The move sets the stage for a series of amusing urban/rural contrasts (toy company/clam-packing factory, colonic irrigation/muck-spreading, and so on) which the film cleverly integrates with a set of narrative parallels. For example, the splendidly unsentimental bond which forms between Sawako and Arai's daughter Kayoko reflects similarities in their histories: Sawako left home, taking only a photograph of her late mother, because she caught her father *in flagrante* with another woman, while Kayoko knows that her own mother walked out because Arai went philandering. The endlessly self-deluding Arai lets down both Sawako and his daughter by going off with the local sexpot Tomomi, whose lust



Moving on: Shiga Kotaro, Mitsushima Hikari

merges with her longstanding desire to pay back Sawako for running off with the hottest boy in the village, the captain of the local tennis club. These neat symmetries are a major source of the film's humour.

Sawako Decides is Ishii Yuya's first 35mm film for cinema release, funded by a 'scholarship' from the Pia Film Festival and a group of partner-sponsors. (PFF, organised by the listings magazine *Pia*, offers these 'scholarships' to winners of its Grand Prix for indie filmmaking; the scheme may have to end because *Pia's* future

is in doubt.) Ishii won the PFF prize with *Bare-Assed Japan* (2005), made as a graduate project at Osaka University of the Arts, and had notched up four more indie features by 2009, all of them smart, funny and skilfully written and edited. His productivity has sharpened his talent (uncluttered *mise en scène*, perfect casting, fresh perceptions) and strengthened his attack. *Sawako* (the Japanese title means *Good Morning from the Bottom of the River*) is a gently subversive delight.

♦♦ Tony Rayns

CREDITS

Producer
Amano Mayumi
Screenplay
Ishii Yuya
Director of Photography
Okimura Yukihiro
Editor
Takahashi Koichi
Production Designer
Ozeki Tatsuo
Music
Imamura Samon
Nomura Chika
Sound Recording
Kato Hirokazu
Ochi Mika
Costume Designer
Kyoko Baba

©PFF Partners (PIA,

TBS, Tokyo FM, Imagica, Avex Entertainment, Usen)
Production Companies
Avex Entertainment Inc., Imagica, PIA, Tokyo Broadcasting System, Tokyo FM, Usen Corporation
Produced with the support of the PFF Scholarship Fund
Supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs
Executive Producers
Chiba Ryuei
Ujue Natsuhiko
Uno Yasuhide
Yauchi Hiroshi

CAST

Mitsushima Hikari
Kimura Sawako
Endo Masashi
Arai Kenichi
Aihara Kira
Arai Kayoko
Shiga Kotaro
Kimura Tadao, Sawako's father
Iwamatsu Ryo
Kimura Nobuo
Namiki Shirô
Takagi Masaki
Aihara Kira
Arai Kayoko, Kenichi's daughter
Inagawa Miyoko
Shiota Toshiko
Inomata Toshiaki
Shiota Junzo
Suzuki Natsumi

Muraoka Tomomichi
Sugama Isamu
Endo Susumu
Makino Emi
Saito Kyoko

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Third Window Films Limited

Japanese theatrical title
Kawa no soko kara konnichi-wa

Screwed

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Reg Traviss

Certificate 18 109m 50s

Screwed is a canny title – one that hints at ratcheting suspense, spiralling fortunes, characters so tightly wound they're liable to splinter apart. It's also a title that tips a self-reflexive wink. Most of the audience for Reg Traviss's prison drama will know that 'screw' is slang for a prison guard, and it's easy to conclude that such a title must surely mean the filmmakers are well aware of the limitations and expectations of the genre. Unfortunately then that this dreary, workaday throwback not only lacks character, tension and innovation, but is also unsophisticated, humourless and listless into the bargain.

Eschewing the whimsy of horticulturally based Clive Owen lockdown *Greenfingers* (2000) and the larkiness of Peter Cattaneo's *Lucky Break* (2001) – and indulging in none of the unglued surrealism of *Bronson* (2008) – Traviss opts instead to keep things as tonally and visually flat, monotonous and grim as prison life must surely be. Given that it's based on the memoirs of a veteran prison officer, there's little doubting the authenticity of what's on screen, nor the mundanity of the job or the surroundings. But stripped of the more elaborate genre trappings, *Screwed* has to rely on plot and character, and there are deep problems with both.

A main plot thread concerning guards colluding with inmates to smuggle drugs into the prison is fairly craftily handled, but the characters – from James D'Arcy's green-but-decent guard down to Noel Clarke's sneering convict drug lord – are so thinly drawn and uninvolved that it's hard to muster any interest as to who's behind it all. Characters are allowed only enough personality to function within the narrative. Prison movies are full of archetypes – wicked wardens, bent screws, kindly old lags – but Traviss and screenwriter Colin Butts have reduced their characters to ambulatory plot points.

D'Arcy's rangy Frodo-meets-Ralph Fiennes innocence plays well in early scenes where he learns the ropes, but

he looks notably uncomfortable and none too convincing rolling around in snooker halls, 'titty bars' and dour institutional boozers as his character descends into an unpersuasive stupor of drugs and unruliness. Clarke glowers impressively and is possessed of enough lithe charm to just about get away with some of the worst of the risible dialogue that flows through the film. In a different class altogether are the excellent Jamie Foreman, who provides some real fire as D'Arcy's gnarly line boss, and Frank Harper, who brings more than his usual amount of matey menace and wet-eyed malice to the otherwise tired role of a corrupt guard.

♦♦ Adam Lee Davies

CREDITS

Produced by
Ronnie Thompson
James Harris
Suki Dulai
Written by
Ronnie Thompson
Colin Butts
Based on the book by
Ronnie Thompson
Director of Photography
Bryan Loftus
Editor
John Palmer
Production Designer
Kajsa Soderlund
Music Composed by
George Kallis
Supervising Sound Designer
Alex Joseph
Costume Designer
Becky Gore

Production Company
Sunya Productions
presents a Reg Traviss film

Executive Producers
Nicola Pearcey
Suki Dulai
Martin Halls
Kewal Dulai
Harry Dulai

CAST

James D'Arcy
Sam
Frank Harper
Deano
Kate Magowan
Danielle
David Hayman
Keenan
Cal MacAninch
Eddie
Andrew Shim
Jamie
Ray Panthaki
Neil
Doug Allen
Steadman

Jamie Foreman
Rumpole
Noel Clarke
Truman
Heather Peace
Charlie
Martin Hancock
Bowers

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

9,885 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS The 23-year-old Kimura Sawako drinks too much beer, works part-time in a Tokyo toy company and has a desultory relationship with divorced toy-designer Arai Kenichi, who is trying to persuade his taciturn infant daughter Kayoko to accept Sawako as a 'new mother'. When Sawako hears from her uncle Nobuo that her father Tadao is dying of cirrhosis, Arai (newly fired from his job) urges her to move back home to run the family's freshwater clam packing business. Sawako is reluctant (she hasn't spoken to her father since she 'eloped' with a local boy five years ago) but, as usual, passively agrees. In Kawaminami village she finds the business nearly bankrupt and the workforce (tough, elderly women) hostile. While Sawako begins to bond with Kayoko, Arai allows himself to be seduced by the local siren Tomomi, who soon persuades him to take her to Tokyo. Seeing her father rise from his deathbed to berate Arai pushes Sawako into two decisions: first, that she will accept her own and Arai's mediocrity and eventually marry him, and second, that she will work to save the company. She wins the support of the workforce by confessing her past failings and, with Kayoko's help, tricks her father into providing a financial loan. Sales have doubled by the time her father dies. Tomomi meanwhile tires of Arai and dumps him back in the village. Angry with herself for missing him, Sawako accepts Arai back after her father's funeral.

SYNOPSIS South-east England, present day. Recently returned from a tour in Afghanistan, ex-soldier Sam Norwood reluctantly takes a job as a prison officer in order to provide for his young family. Initially daunted, he proves himself during an altercation with a prisoner and falls in with Deano, a more experienced guard. He also comes to know Truman, an inmate who, with the aid of certain guards, controls the drugs trade in the prison.

Sam is soon consumed by his job, neglecting his family and indulging in escalating drug use as he spends more time with Deano and his co-workers. Discovering that another inmate is cutting into his drug business, Truman beats him half to death. Sam's behaviour becomes so antisocial that his wife throws him out. One of Sam's colleagues gets close to smashing the prison drugs ring, and is shot dead. Worked up by this event, Sam punches Truman. Sam discovers that Deano is behind Truman's drug business; before he can act on this information, he's confronted by Deano and Truman during a prison riot. Deano tells Truman to kill Sam but – no longer willing to work for Deano – Truman instead slashes Deano.

It is hinted that the prison warden will offer Truman a reduced sentence in exchange for his silence over the drugs ring. Sam quits his job and is reunited with his wife.

Super

USA/United Kingdom 2011

Director: James Gunn

Don Quixote had chivalric romance; Emma Bovary had sentimental novels; these days, it seems, the popular literary mode of choice for frustrated narcissists with delusional tendencies is caped crusading. In parallel with the ongoing superhero-movie revival spearheaded by Marvel's *Spider-Man*, *X-Men* and *Iron Man* franchises, the past few years have seen the rise of a shadow-form that could be called mock-superheroic: stories in which impressionable souls take a little too closely to heart the spandex-slathered fantasies consumed in their leisure hours. Key titles in this subgenre would include 2006's *Special*, in which Michael Rapaport played a guinea pig in an anti-depressant drug trial who became convinced he possessed superpowers; 2009's *Defendor*, with Woody Harrelson; and, more prominently, last year's *Kick-Ass*, starring Aaron Johnson as a teenager setting out to right New York's wrongs.

Now comes *Super*, in which short-order cook Frank (played by Rainn Wilson, familiar as Dwight in the NBC version of *The Office*) dons tights and wields wrench as crimefighter the Crimson Bolt, jointly inspired by his wife's falling under the influence of drug dealer Jacques (Kevin Bacon), a Christian TV adventure series called *The Holy Avenger*, and his own confused feelings around inferiority and injustice. Before long, he has a sidekick – comic-store employee Libby (Ellen Page) – a hefty arsenal and plans for a showdown with Jacques.

Directed by James Gunn (writer of

the *Dawn of the Dead* revamp and *Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*) and a veteran of the Troma mini-studio), *Super* is genuinely perverse. It's impressively realised for a low-budget project, well cast, often well lit, often funny and executed with a solid grasp of action and a smattering of quirky digital effects; this is surely the first superhero picture in which the protagonist sees the face of the damsel in distress formed by vomit in his toilet. It's clear from early on that Frank is not well balanced, prone to religious visions and brutally violent in his vigilantism from the off. Libby's hysterical bloodlust, however, puts his wrench-work in the shade. Notable too is her sexual relish of the fetishistic side of the hero game – an aspect occasionally winked at in other films but here given some prominence – and her kneejerk abdication of responsibility for her own actions, a trait shared by Jacques.

It remains uncertain whether the movie itself takes responsibility for its excesses. Old-school aesthetic aside – the film includes some nifty hand-drawn credits and the occasional onscreen 'KA-POW!' – *Super* is engaged with ideas of contemporary alienation and addiction, particularly the abdication of personal responsibility and grounded identity in favour of off-the-peg mass-media models of behaviour. The mock-superheroic subject is often seen to be superheroic after all – in both *Kick-Ass* and *Special* the lead is revealed to have abilities beyond the normal. *Super* doesn't go down that path but it offers a disturbingly ambiguous ending in which, rather than disavowing his violence, Frank stands by his methods for head-scratchingly sentimental reasons. It's a suitably perplexing conclusion to a bloody, peculiar picture. **Ben Walters**



Spandex ballet: Ellen Page



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CREDITS

Produced by
Ted Hope
Miranda Bailey
Written by
James Gunn
Director of Photography
Steve Gainer
Editor
Cara Silverman
Production Designer
William Elliott
Music
Tyler Bates
Sound Design
Jon Johnson
Costume Designer
Mary Matthews

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Production Companies
Cold Iron Pictures
presents in association
with Hanway Films a
This is that, Ambush
Entertainment
production
A James Gunn Film
Executive Producers
Raimi Wilson
Lampton Enoch
Matt Leutwyler
Film Extracts
Troma's War (1990)

CAST

Raimi Wilson
Frank D'Arbo, 'The
Crimson Bolt'
Ellen Page
Libby, 'Boltie'
Liv Tyler
Sarah Helgeland

SYNOPSIS Diner cook Frank adores his wife Sarah, a recovering alcoholic and drug addict. Sarah falls under the influence of Jacques, a drug dealer, and leaves Frank to live with him. When the police offer no help, Frank tries to get Sarah back but is beaten up by Jacques's goons. After watching a religious superhero TV show, Frank creates a superhero persona, the Crimson Bolt. Armed with a wrench, he attacks several street criminals and hospitalises a couple who jump the queue at a cinema.

Libby, a clerk at a comic-book store, suspects that Frank is the Crimson Bolt. Frank tries to rescue Sarah from Jacques's ranch, where she is being used to test heroin shipments, but is shot in the leg. Libby tends to him and becomes his sidekick, Boltie. They beat up a young man who might have damaged her friend's car. Aghast at her casual violence, Frank dismisses Libby but takes her back when she saves him from Jacques's goons. They buy heavy weaponry and she pressures Frank into having sex, to his distress.

A major drug deal is under way at Jacques's ranch. He leaves a strung-out Sarah with a gangster, Mr Range, who plans to rape her. Frank and Libby advance on the ranch, killing many guards. Libby is shot dead. Mr Range turns on Jacques, who kills him. Jacques turns Sarah over to Frank then shoots him, but Frank kills Jacques.

Sarah leaves Frank soon afterwards, but becomes healthy, remarries and has four children, to Frank's gratification.

Kevin Bacon
Jacques
Gregg Henry
Detective Felkner
Michael Rooker
Abe
André Royo
Hamilton
Sean Gunn
Toby
Stephen Blackheart
Quill
Don Mac
Mr Range
Linda Cardellini
pet store employee
Nathan Fillion
The Holy Avenger

Colour by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
G2 Pictures

Swinging with the Finkels

United Kingdom/India/
Germany/USA 2010
Director: Jonathan Newman
Certificate 15 84m 39s

Swinging with the Finkels is a film about wealthy Jewish Londoners falling in and out of love, usually while sampling haute cuisine at a posh restaurant with friends whose Filipino nanny (a non-speaking role) looks after their photogenic children in a Primrose Hill mansion. Even contemporary period Woody Allen would reject its characters as sexist, racist, classist and implausible.

The film adopts the illogic of recent American 'comedies': men are homoerotically pair-bonded toddlers for whom intelligent, attractive women sacrifice their ambition and desire in order to avoid being alone. Intertitles proclaiming pop-psych soundbites from the sex wars neon-signpost every plot 'twist' in advance, rendering the interstitial action redundant, compounded by flat, televisual cinematography and performances unworthy of a lesser 1970s sitcom.

As directed by Jonathan Newman, who crams in every product and storefront placement possible, the film seems intended to generate class rage in viewers watching bourgeois couples fiddle with other bourgeois couples while the economy burns. When these people separate, it's with zero anxieties about child support and mansion mortgages, even when the philandering husband stops working. A final end-credits clip, in which an overweight man in bondage gear says apologetically that he's a banker, is the closest the film comes to anti-establishment comedy.

The non-ostentatious but enabling wealth of Richard Curtis-style artsy English bohemia is the aspirational idea here. Ellie, a designer supposedly preparing for her first catwalk show, spends her days getting mani-pedis à la *Sex in the City* when she's not communing in Soho with her gay French assistant whose Spanish boyfriend lithps, while her Chinese beautician speak Engrish. Both of these caricatures deliver *Valley of the Dolls*-era sex advice (swing and

SYNOPSIS London, the present. Alvin and Ellie Finkel have been married for nine years. He's an architect, she's a clothes designer. They live in a loft by Borough Market, and regularly spend time with their close friends Janet and Peter, who have two small children. Peter confides to Alvin that he had an affair with one of his dental patient, which has left him with venereal disease; Alvin and Ellie confide in Peter and Janet respectively, revealing that their marriage is becoming sexless. Ellie's beautician advises her to try masturbating with a cucumber, which she attempts shortly before Alvin arrives back from the airport with her grandparents, catching her *in flagrante*.

Janet and Peter confirm the need to keep passion alive, leading Alvin and Ellie to consider swinging. They interview a series of inappropriate couples before finding Richard and Clementine, with whom they arrange a date that ends awkwardly. Peter moves out after telling Karen about his affair, while Alvin and Ellie row about his continuing lack of interest in her work, leading Alvin to move in with Peter.

After spending time with his sons, Peter reconnects with Karen, and they try to bring Alvin and Ellie back together, first by persuading Alvin to attend Ellie's first catwalk show, then – after Alvin leaves in a fit of pique when Ellie has to talk business – at a New Year's Eve party. Alvin arrives late as Ellie leaves, but she returns to deposit a gift for him: a pair of baby shoes, which reunites the couple.



Mandy Moore, Martin Freeman

masturbate, respectively) with predictable results. A series of interviews with stereotypically appalling (old! foreign! fat!) potential swinging partners plays out as an insult to *When Harry Met Sally*, which this film would dearly love to be but can't even pastiche competently. **♥♥ Sophie Mayer**

CREDITS

Produced by
Deepak Nayyar
Written by
Jonathan Newman
Director of Photography
Dirk Nel
Editor
Eddie Hamilton
Production Designer
James Lewis
Music Composed by
Mark Thomas
Sound Recordist
Billy Quinn
Costume Designer
Annie Hardinge

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Production Companies
Reliance Big Pictures
and Starlight Film
Partners present in
association with Kintop
Pictures and Filmaka a
Deepak Nayyar
production
A film by Jonathan
Newman
Produced by Starlight
Film Partners LLP on
behalf of Uno Films
Limited
Executive Producers
Philip von Alvensleben
Thomas Augsburg
David Mulch

CAST

Martin Freeman
Alvin Finkel
Mandy Moore
Ellie Finkel
Jonathan Silverman
Peter
Melissa George
Janet
Angus Deayton
Richard
Paul Chowdhry
Henry
Daisy Beaumont
Clementine
Jerry Stiller
Mr Winters
Beverley Klein
Mrs Winters
Edward Akroft
Andrew
Andi Osho
Nurse Franklin
Tim Beckman
Jim

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Uno Films Limited

7618 ft +8 frames

Treacle Jr.

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Jamie Thraves

Treacle Jr. is our Film of the Month
and is reviewed on page 58.

CREDITS

Produced by
Rob Small
Jamie Thraves
Written by
Jamie Thraves
Cinematography
Catherine Derry
Nigel Kinnings
Edited by
Tom Lindsay
Ross Hallard
Production Design
Steve Ritchie
Sound Design
Tristin Norwell
Costume Design
Jo Thompson

©Golden Rule Films
Production Company
A Golden Rule
production
A film by Jamie Thraves
Executive Producers
Anne Harrison
Nigel Harrison
Nicky Clarke-Thraves
Jamie Thraves
Natasha Dack
Nikki Parrott

CAST

Aidan Gillen
Aidan
Tom Fisher
Tom
Riann Steele
Linda
Thomas Murray-Leslie
Tom's son
Elizabeth Murray-Leslie
Tom's wife

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

SYNOPSIS The present. Tom leaves his wife and child in suburban Birmingham, gets the train to London, throws away his phone and credit cards, then spends the evening on a park bench. Fearing attack by a gang, he's knocked cold in a collision with a tree, and is accosted in A&E by Aidan, a socially maladjusted Irishman who's as loud as he is over-friendly. Tom tries to escape this apparent nutter, but fails to do so after he's distracted by a couple having sex in a graveyard.

Aidan shelters him at his flat, but Tom is ejected by Aidan's girlfriend, domineering Linda (the woman from the graveyard). After a night in a shop doorway, Tom comes to the rescue after Aidan is beaten by a café owner, though later there's a bust-up between the two men, as Tom reveals his desire to escape Aidan's company. Discovering a spare cash card wrapped inside the family photo he's kept, Tom just misses the last train back to Birmingham, then apologetically gives Aidan some rent money.

Aidan now has enough for the drum kit he believes will be his ticket to fame, but he loses the cash when he is mugged by the shady guy from the churchyard. Linda's complicity is revealed, sparking a violent confrontation, ended by her asthmatic reaction to Aidan's new kitten Treacle Jr. Aidan throws her out and Tom realises it's time for him to go too. The next day, the ever-hopeful Aidan discovers the drum kit has gone from the shop. Alone in the flat with the kitten, he breaks down – only to find the drums in his room. Tom is on the way back to Birmingham.

The Tree of Life

USA 2010

Director: Terrence Malick
Certificate 12A 138m 45s

As you may well have already deduced, Terrence Malick's new hyper-reverie is an entirely unique launch into the present-moment film-culture ether – an ambitious Rorschach blot that is almost exactly as pretentious and unwittingly absurd as it is inspired, evocative and gorgeous. It often seems to have been deliberately calibrated to divide its viewership into warring camps, to intoxicate the Malickians into awestruck swoons just as it produces scoffings from the sceptics and stupefies the average filmgoer. But that presumes Malick considers a viewership at all – which he may not, and if there are many, many ways to look at *The Tree of Life*, which seems already to be a film that's more interesting to argue about than to actually watch, then it's difficult to shake the sense of it as the spectacle of a man gone deep-sea diving in his own navel.

Still, the hand-to-heart camp proclaims, Malick's navel is a spectacular place, and he is a transcendent guide. To each his own epiphany. I, just so we're clear, have not been a Malick sceptic until now; his 1970s double-hitter ages beautifully, and *The Thin Red Line* (1998) is an epochal explosion of broken hearts, adrenal fever and genre-movie subversions. *The New World* (2005), for all its historical pathmarks, played like a sweet chapter elided from the previous film, with much of the same visual and tonal vocabulary. The new film indulges in the same battery of lyrical flourishes – tracking shots through wind-waving grass, Vermeer-ish light through open windows, whispered quasi-poetic narration, tree canopies splintering the sun, magic-hour duskiness etc, the images beautifully shot by Emmanuel Lubezki – but immediately also takes off into nether regions and isolated oases that defiantly test any reasonable viewer's credulity.

The Texas family at the film's viscous centre is introduced in fragmented swatches; we're introduced to Brad Pitt's embittered Dad and Jessica Chastain's angelic Mom in their middle years (though they're not visibly aged), when they receive a telegram indicating a grown son's death. Which son we're not sure, but we know there are three, and one grows up to be a dyspeptic Sean Penn, brooding around Dallas skyscrapers. Then before we know it the film wordlessly enters into a massive chapter that, like a James A. Michener mega-novel, visits the gas-and-fume origins of the Earth, from abstracted galactic explosion to volcanic eruption to microbial growth to the predatory lives of state-of-the-art digital dinosaurs. Like the first and last acts of 2001 turned inside out (FX master Douglas Trumbull came out of retirement, and Jupiter is glimpsed,



Bradlands: Brad Pitt, Laramie Eppler

God knows why), or a BBC nature special without the narration, this passage is *The Tree of Life's* crucifix, upon which it either dies a lowly mortal movie or becomes reborn as something holy, its fate dependent entirely on your tolerance of or hunger for unleashed and ambiguous cosmic revelation.

Then the family begins, with babies and Waco suburbia and endless dusks,

and the best opportunity offered here is to take the movie as a Malick memoir, in which case the ellipses and idealisations and fiery textural moments (a butterfly, a touch, an exultant running, a satin chemise) make enchanting personal sense. This way, *The Tree of Life* becomes an extended 'experimental' film à la Brakhage or Mekas, or even a home movie re-envisioned, re-enacted and

saturated with nostalgia. Critics have only wondered idly about this textual notion, and Malick would apparently prefer we don't follow this thread, but it's true enough: he was born in Waco to a petroleum company geologist (as is Pitt's incarnation) and an Irish mother (Chastain is a pale-skinned ginger flame), and had two brothers, one of whom committed suicide as a young man, living in Spain. (Ninety-four-year-old Emil Malick still lives in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, where Malick grew up.) There's a visionary sweetness to Malick's memoirising, but also a narcissistic grandiosity, uniting all his present and past selves, dead and living loved ones, on a vast beach under a liturgical chorus, and considering the mystery of his own birth by returning to the origins of primordial ooze.

Does Malick think the universe shines out of his ass? Do you? It would've helped if Malick's eulogising his family and his brother had more blood in its stock. (Compare how Bergman essayed his childhood, in rich and dramatic detail over four heady screenplays, or the acidity and irony brought to childhood memoirs by Truffaut, Woody Allen and Alexei German.) On the evidence, the filmmaker knows nothing but a child's worshipfulness for his peaceful, nurturing, Raphaelite mother, and something of a rueful contempt for his martinet dad, whose brutal fathering habits and festering regrets about an abandoned music career provide *The Tree of Life* with its only dramatic percolation, simplistic though it is. Malick attempts in several ways to suggest a replay of the story of Job that just seems half-hearted, and a running thematic dialogue between self-sacrificing grace (mother) and selfish, self-directed Nature (father), but the religious intonations and parabolic auras don't suggest the complex view of a retrospective adult, only the dreamy feelings of the kid, stuck in a rather ordinary family conflict.

Malick, of course, is enough of a magician to craft breath-catching moments by the dozen; he stays close enough to the boys (particularly Hunter McCracken as discontented Malick avatar Jack and Laramie Eppler as doomed, favoured middle son R.L., resembling Pitt to a startling degree) to nail this particular experience of boyhood to the wall for all time – the endless lawns and wide streets, the spaces between houses and neighbourhoods where adults can't find you, the idle moments among friends in the woods thinking up something dangerous with which to fill up a summer afternoon. Without the dizzying assault of sacred bluster (and the occasional mytho-surrealist touches, like levitation and Sleeping Beauty's glass coffin, which simply scan like ideas Malick had and then gave up on), the film might have been an intimate and evocative masterpiece, an anthropological ode to a lost America. But who among us can begrudge the besotted Malickians if, in their woozy ardour, they've found exactly that and more? **Michael Atkinson**

CREDITS

Produced by
Sarah Green
Bill Pohlad
Brad Pitt
Dede Gardner
Grant Hill
Written by
Terrence Malick
Director of Photography
Emmanuel Lubezki
Edited by
Hank Corwin
Jay Rabinowitz
Daniel Rezende
Billy Weber
Mark Yoshikawa
Production Designer
Jack Fisk
Music
Alexandre Desplat

Sound Designers
Craig Berkey
Erik Aadahl
Will Files
Costume Designer
Jacqueline West
Visual Effects Consultant
Douglas Trumbull
Visual Effects
Natural Realm
Prime Focus VFX
Astrophysical Realm
Double Negative
Microbial Realm
One of Us
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Production Company
River Road
Entertainment presents

Executive Producer
Donald Rosenfeld
Film Extracts
Destiny in Space (1994)
Home (2009)
Island of the Sharks (1999)

CAST

Brad Pitt
Mr O'Brien
Sean Penn
Jack O'Brien
Jessica Chastain
Mrs O'Brien
Fiona Shaw
grandmother
Irene Bedard
messenger
Jessica Fusellier
guide

Hunter McCracken
young Jack
Laramie Eppler
R.L.
Tye Sheridan
Steve
Nicolas Gonda
Mr Reynolds

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
Colour/Prints by
DeLuxe
[L85:1]

Distributor
Icon Film Distribution
12,487 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS In an impressionistic montage we see the O'Briens, a family of five living in Waco, Texas. At some middle stage in their lives the parents receive a telegram informing them of the death of one of their sons; a funeral takes place. We are then drawn into an abstract view of the birth of the Earth, or the universe, envisioned as organic babbings and explosions. The Earth cools, organisms develop, landscapes form, dinosaurs live and die.

We return to the O'Briens, with the three brothers being born and growing up in the 1950s. The eldest brother develops a relentlessly adversarial relationship with the father. The latter, a disappointed musician working for an oil company, is severely strict and hot-tempered with everybody in the family. He tries to teach the boys to be tough, while their mother nurtures them wordlessly. The three brothers grow, battle, support each other, exult when their father leaves on a business trip, and then suffer his return. When his plant closes, the family must face the prospect of moving. As an adult, the eldest son is haunted by memories of these times, and is perpetually testy and prone to violence.

These remembrances morph into a kind of dream, in which all the characters from all ages commingle on a beach.



Seeing is believing: Clive Owen, Liana Liberato, Catherine Keener

Viva Riva!

France/Belgium/Congo/
South Africa/Angola 2010
Director: Djo Tunda Wa Munga
Certificate 15 97m 56s

This Kinshasa-set crime thriller, Djo Tunda Wa Munga's feature debut, tells the story of charismatic operator Riva, returning home from Angola after a long absence with money to burn and mobsters on his heels. The plot is complicated by Riva's determination to go after the wrong girl, which leaves him caught in a pincer movement between the Angolans and a local gang. But if that bare outline suggests a standard genre piece with a novel setting, *Viva Riva!* is much more than that.

Munga doesn't try to transcend his chosen template; instead he sets out to own it – his delight in pushing genre buttons is thrillingly obvious. The tone flickers between bracingly unsentimental and *noir* cynicism. Everyone is corrupt, from the army to the border officials to the church. "Priests need gas too, alas," shrugs one unfussy cleric while negotiating to buy Riva's smuggled petrol. In this amoral environment, hero/antihero Riva is determined to wring maximum enjoyment from the weekend with his new money, and Munga is no less determined to do the same from the 110 minutes of his film.

Drawn from local non-professionals, the cast give fresh, candid performances, especially Patsha Bay as Riva, Manie Malone as Nora (the object of his lust) and Hoji Fortuna as sadistic Angolan gangster César. The frank sexuality of the film is unusual – Munga claims unprecedented – in a Congolese production: Riva plays Peeping Tom, performs oral sex through a barred window and loiters in a brothel (in scenes that Munga invests with a dreamlike dislocation from reality).

If *Viva Riva!*'s unashamed flirtation with pulp themes of streetlife and nightlife, sex, violence and crime at times recalls blaxploitation, then the cold-blooded César practically embodies it: he pimp-limps from scene to scene in white suit, wide lapels and dandy's cane, apparently too fastidious to bloody his own hands – until the denouement at least. *Viva Riva!* isn't a straightforward exploitation piece though: one of the most intense and surprising moments in the film is a lesbian sex scene – in which the participants remain fully clothed.

For all its energy and ideas, *Viva Riva!* is probably at least ten minutes too long. Munga's imaginative resources are overstretched as he tries to put off Riva's eventual endgame and maintain tension. There's an over-reliance on one of the thriller form's lazier gambits, in which characters presumed dead stagger to their feet. But with its quickfire shifts from sex to violence to betrayal and back again, that exclamation point in Munga's title is fully earned. **◆ Sam Davies**

Trust

USA 2010
Director: David Schwimmer
Certificate 15 105m 52s

Any film combining subjects heavily loaded with cultural paranoia – sex, technology and teenagers – treads a teetering high wire to avoid either prurient exploitation or scaremongering. No surprise, then, that David Schwimmer's heartfelt but periodically heavyhanded stranger-danger drama, in which insecure Chicago teen Annie is groomed and raped by an online predator, periodically assumes the lock-up-your-daughters vibe of a TV after-school special. Where the shocksploitation of David Slade's *Hard Candy* (2005) pitched its potential victim as a table-turning teen vigilante for dramatic effect, *Trust*'s more conventional melodrama explores, with variable results, the psychological fallout from the assault.

Sensitively adapted from a stage play by Schwimmer and Andy Bellin, the film initially gives its lurid theme a measured treatment. But its earnest portrayal of both the crime and its aftermath is undermined by a determination to cram in its every effect on Annie's easygoing father Will, transformed into a fantasy-plagued vigilante by the assault. Topping it off with accusing glances at a culture that sexualises girls relentlessly (Will is, with heavy irony, creating a scantily clad, teen-titillating advertising campaign), the film has visibly bitten off more than it can chew.

When it isn't cramming a quart into a pint pot, Andy Bellin and Robert Festinger's script is perceptive about teen life, in a first act peppered with high school's cool-chasing 'mean girls' and the ego-bolstering online confidences Annie exchanges with student 'Charlie', which edge into giggly phone sex. Superimposing their typed exchanges on the screen as Annie goes about her business is admittedly hokey, part of Schwimmer's plodding visual style, yet it makes visible her invisible, parallel digital life: via email, text and phone calls, 14-year-old Annie

is emotionally enmeshed with 'Charlie' by day and night. Sure, there's a hint of technophobia as the MacBook Pro that Will proudly gifts her becomes a portal for a predator. But the film is acute rather than preachy about social networking's seamless integration into teen lifestyles, as it is about Annie's sexual curiosity and her all too believable longing for her confected suitor, even after he has attacked her.

Liana Liberato's thin-skinned performance makes the most of these uncomfortable insights, switching between Annie's surly or needy or just plain flirtatious moods with great naturalism. When 'Charlie' is revealed as a manipulative fortysomething in baggy chinos, her tight-lipped stoicism and irritable disappointment are horribly plausible. Like her gawky posing in the red underwear he provides, it acknowledges her ambivalence as well as her fear. This subtlety evaporates, however, once the film decides to concentrate

on Will's emotional disintegration as well as Annie's. Schwimmer, like many an actor-turned-director, gets great work from his leads (the sublime Catherine Keener contributes a squeezed portrait of bewildered motherhood) but seems over-fond of those moments that allow for Big Acting. The lion's share of these go to Clive Owen's Will, who dominates the film's second half valiantly emoting through a series of clunky vengeance compulsions, before launching a crazed assault on a parent he has identified as a paedophile.

Rather than morphing into a companion piece to the US TV paedophile-trap reality show *To Catch a Predator*, *Trust* might have done better to stick closer to its heroine. Like Catherine Hardwicke's wild-child cautionary tale *Thirteen* (2003), it's at its modest best showing the stresses and inchoate longings of teen life through Annie's eyes – and at its least convincing when parental angst fogs the lens. **◆ Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by
Tom Hodges
Ed Cathell III
Dana Golomb
David Schwimmer
Robert Greenhut
Heidi Jo Markel
Written by
Andy Bellin
Robert Festinger
Director of Photography
Andrzej Sekula
Edited by
Douglas Crise
Production Designer
Michael Shaw
Music
Nathan Larson

Sound Mixer
David Obermeyer
Costume Designer
Ellen Lutter

©Trust Productions
(Michigan) LLC
Production Companies
Millennium Films
presents a Nu Image
production
A Dark Harbor
production
Executive Producers
Avi Lerner
Danny Dimbort
Trevor Short
Boaz Davidson
John Thompson

CAST

Clive Owen
Will Cameron
Catherine Keener
Lynn Cameron
Liana Liberato
Annie Cameron
Jason Clarke
Doug Tate
Chris Henry Coffey
Glen Weston
Joe Sikora
Rob Moscone
Spencer Cumutt
Peter
Noah Emmerich
Al Hart
Viola Davis
Gail Friedman

Aislinn Debutch
Katie
Olivia Wickline
Katie
Zoe Levin
Brittany
Zanny Laird
Serena Edmonds
Yolanda Mendoza
Tanya

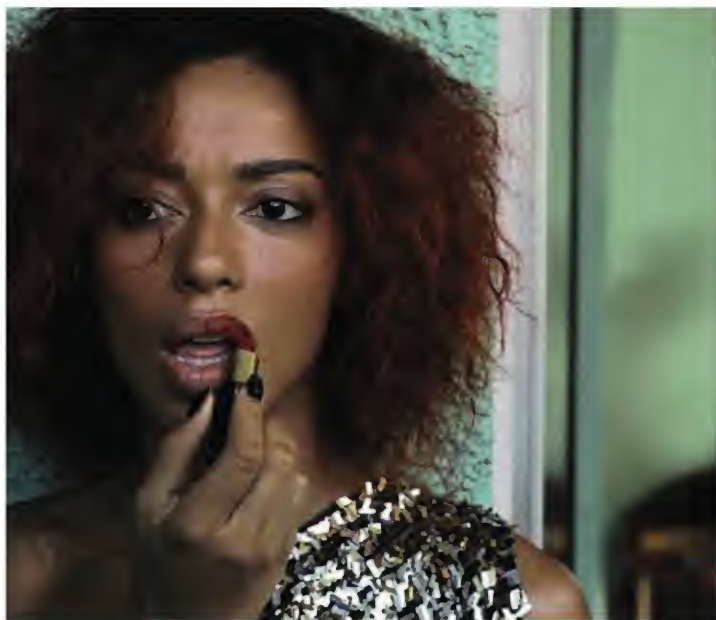
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

9.528 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Chicago, the present. Fourteen-year-old schoolgirl Annie has an internet chatroom friendship with student 'Charlie', which deepens into phone sex. He admits to being 25. When her parents are away, they meet. He is a fortyish adult who coerces her into sex in a hotel room. Her best friend alerts the school, and the FBI becomes involved, to Annie's horror. Her father Will is tormented by the assault, joining an online predator-watch group. Will stalks a local suspect and trawls a chat-site, masquerading as a teen girl, to out predators. He and Annie are at loggerheads. Charlie evades a phone trace when Annie calls him. She is repulsed when FBI officers show her photographs of other young girls he has raped, traced by a DNA sample. Will beats up the local suspected predator at a volleyball game. A faked web-page of Annie having sex circulates at school, and she attempts suicide with pills. Will finds her and makes her vomit. Will and Annie are reconciled after he admits his horror at failing to protect her.

We see 'Charlie', a teacher with a wife and young son, enjoying a family day out.



Pulp fiction: Manie Malone

CREDITS

Producer
Djo Tunda Wa Munga
Written by
Djo Tunda Wa Munga
Director of Photography
Antoine Roch
Editor
Yves Langlois
Art Director
Philippe van Herwijnen
Original Music
Louis Vyncke
Congopunk
Sound Recordist
Marianne Roussy
Costumes
Ramelie Mulanga
Charlotte Lebourgeois

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Productions, Suka
Production Companies
A Formosa production
in co-production with
MG Productions, Suka
Productions, Big World
Cinema, Mediatik,
Gamboa & Gamboa
With the participation of
Canal+, CinéCinéma
With the financial
contribution of the
European Union (Fonds

Européen de
Développement), with
the assistance of
Groupe des Etats ACP
With the financial
contribution of Centre
du Cinéma et de
l'Audiotvisuel de la
Communauté française
de Belgique and
télédiffuseurs wallons
With the participation of
Ministère français des
Affaires Étrangères -
Fonds Images Afrique,
Fonds Sud Cinéma,
Ministère de la Culture
et de la Communication
CNC - Ministère des
Affaires Étrangères et
Européennes France
With the support of
Fonds Francophone de
production audiovisuelle
du Sud (Organisation
Internationale de la
Francophonie and
CIRTEF)
A uFilm co-production
in association with
uFund
In co-production with
Panache Productions
Edo's mother
Compagnie
Cinématographique
Européenne (Gaetan

David)
With the support of Tax
Shelter du
Gouvernement Fédéral
de Belgique
With the support of
Cofinova 6
With the participation of
BeTV
Developed with the
support of MEDIA
Programme of the
European Community
A film by Djo Tunda Wa
Munga

CAST

Patsha Bay
Riva
Manie Malone
Nora
Hoji Fortuna
César
Mariène Longange
commandante
Diplome Amekindra
Azor
Alex Herabo
JM
Angelique Mbumb
Malou
Nzita Tumba
Edo's mother
Davly Ilunga
Joaquin

Tomas Bié
Jorge
Romain Ndomba
G.O.
Jordan N'Tunga
Anto

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution
Ltd

8,814 ft +6 frames



Mutant mentor: James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender

X-Men First Class

USA/United Kingdom/
Australia 2011

Director: Matthew Vaughn
Certificate 12A 131m 32s

Comic-book characters always carry trace elements of the times in which they were created: Clark Kent is named for Clark Gable, the manliest screen idol of 1938, and Wonder Woman has basically been dressing like a 1941 pin-up for 70 years. Mostly created in the 1960s, Marvel's flagship characters embody a Kennedy-era New Look that no amount of up-to-the-minute gloss – a genetically engineered rather than radioactive spider, malfunctioning lab equipment rather than a gamma bomb test – can cover. For reasons arising from the way the X-Men film franchise has developed, this is the first Marvel movie set in the period when the characters were created, and thus able to embrace the Rat Pack cool that was part of their original charm.

Following 2009's *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, this new film has to fit in with the continuity established in the three movies pitting Patrick Stewart's Xavier against Ian McKellen's Magneto, to the extent of recreating the opening sequence of Bryan Singer's *X-Men* (2000) and working in significant, imaginative cameos for key actors from the made-earlier-but-set-later films. In the struggle to tie things together, some strands are tangled: it's hard to reconcile the Emma Frost played here by an icy January Jones in Vegas showgirl outfits with the one seen in the *Wolverine* movie – though we do get answers to questions few have thought to ask, such as where does Magneto's helmet come from, and who came up with the silly codenames business in the first place?

Director Matthew Vaughn, returning to the fold after abandoning *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006) to Brett Ratner in pre-production, takes from Singer the polarity between assimilationist Xavier and separatist Magneto as a spine around which many, many other characters (some of whom get only a few moments to sparkle) have to fit. Even this episode's Big Bad, Kevin Bacon's semi-immortal megalomaniac, has less weight than Michael Fassbender's Erik Lehnsherr,

who evolves from rogue Nazi killer into the Malcolm X of mutantkind, accepting his new Magneto identity as he turns up in Jack Kirby's original 1963 costume design in the coda. Given that Rebecca Romijn's Mystique was elevated to major player in a thread across the first trilogy, it's apt that Jennifer Lawrence gets such meat as a younger version of the character here. She carries the emotional content of a film that risks being cool in the sense of distant, as well as casually awesome.

Abjuring the ADD overload of much current action cinema, the film is period-apt in its clean lines and dovetailing of subplots, with everyone converging on Cuba for a secret history of the missile crisis. This seems like the foundation for a saga that could profitably be continued, with four decades' worth of real-world history and comics' continuity to be scrambled before it has to join up with the 'near future' of Singer's 2000 movie.

◆ **Kim Newman**

CREDITS

Produced by
Lauren Shuler Donner
Bryan Singer
Simon Kinberg
Gregory Goodman
Screenplay
Ashley Edward Miller
Zack Stentz
Jane Goldman
Matthew Vaughn
Story
Sheldon Turner
Bryan Singer
Director of Photography
John Mathieson
Film Editors
Lee Smith
Eddie Hamilton
Production Designer
Chris Seagers
Music Composed by
Henry Jackman
Sound Design
Matthew Collinge
Robert Prynn
Craig Berkey
Costume Designer
Sammy Sheldon
Visual Effects & Animation
Weta Digital Ltd.
Rhythm & Hues Studios
Digital Domain
Visual Effects
MPC
Cinesite Europe Ltd
Luma Pictures
Stunt Co-ordinators
Jeff Habberstad
Tom Struthers

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Film Corporation and
Dune Entertainment III

LLC (in all territories
except Brazil, Italy,
Japan, Korea and Spain)
©TCF Hungary Film
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Limited Liability
Company, Twentieth
Century Fox Film
Corporation and Dune
Entertainment III LLC (in
Brazil, Italy, Japan,
Korea and Spain)

Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox
presents in association
with Marvel
Entertainment and
Dune Entertainment a
Bad Hat Harry/
Donners' Company
production
A Matthew Vaughn film
Produced in association
with Ingenious Media
Made in association
with Big Screen
Productions and
Ingenious Film Partners
Made with assistance
from The Georgia Film,
Music & Digital
Entertainment Office
Executive Producers
Stan Lee
Tarquin Pack
Josh MacLaglen

CAST

James McAvoy
Charles Xavier (24 yrs)
Michael Fassbender
Erik Lehnsherr, 'Magneto'
Rose Byrne
Moira MacTaggart

SYNOPSIS Kinshasa, the present. After a ten-year absence, Riva arrives back in the city with a cargo of stolen fuel, which he delivers to his fence. Meeting up with old friend JM, he heads out to celebrate with his new wealth. He encounters a beautiful woman, Nora, but she rejects him. Riva and JM move on to Mere Edo's brothel.

Gangster César and his men arrive from Angola, looking for Riva and the stolen fuel. César blackmails an army officer, the commandante, into helping him. She leads him to Riva's driver, whom they kill. The commandante recruits her lover Malou to track Riva down. Riva finds Nora in a nightclub; JM warns him that she is the mistress of local gangster Azor, but Riva tries unsuccessfully to seduce her. She leaves the club after an argument with Azor. Riva follows her home and wins her over, producing an earring that Azor pawned at the club to pay his tab. They spend the night at a hotel, but Riva wakes to find Nora has betrayed him to Azor's men. She argues with Azor before running away. Riva is saved when the hotel porter calls the police.

Using Malou's information, César and his men arrive at Azor's house, where they torture him for Riva's whereabouts. They track him down to Mere Edo's, but just as César corners Riva, the commandante shoots them all. She sets up a deal to sell Riva's fuel herself, but Riva has survived (the bullet missed), as have César and his men (bulletproof vests). Riva finds his fence and they rush to secure his precious fuel. However, César has taken the commandante hostage again and waits in ambush. César kills everyone, leaving Riva to burn to death. As César prepares to drive away with the fuel, the wounded commandante manages to shoot the truck, blowing it up, before dying herself.

Jennifer Lawrence
Raven Darkholme, 'Mystique'
January Jones
Emma Frost
Nicholas Hoult
Hank McCoy, 'Beast'
Oliver Platt
man in black suit
Jason Flemyng
Azazel
Lucas Till
Alex Summers, 'Havoc'
Kevin Bacon
Sebastian Shaw
Caleb Landry Jones
Sean Cassidy, 'Banshee'
Zoe Kravitz
Angel Salvadore
Alex Gonzalez
Jason Quesset, 'Riptide'

Edi Gathegi
Armando Muñoz, 'Darwin'

[uncredited]
Hugh Jackman
Logan, 'Wolverine'
Rebecca Romijn
Mystique

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
Colour/Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

11,838 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS A Polish concentration camp, 1944. Scientist Klaus Schmidt murders the mother of young mutant Erik Lehnsherr to prompt him to use his magnetic powers.

In Westchester, New York, mutant telepath Charles Xavier and shapeshifter Raven Darkholme meet, each discovering that they are not a unique species. In 1962, Erik is a Nazi-hunter on the trail of Schmidt, who now calls himself Sebastian Shaw. A powerful mutant, Shaw gathers others – telepath Emma Frost, demonic-seeming Azazel and wind-manipulating Riptide – into a faction who plot to bring about World War III, wiping out humanity so that mutants can prosper. Xavier, now a geneticist, is approached by CIA agent Moira MacTaggart, who is aware of Shaw's activities, to consult on mutant issues. While spying on Shaw, Xavier meets Erik, and the two become friends. With the support of a covert government agency which already employs agile genius Hank McCoy, Xavier and Erik recruit young mutants Angel, Sean Cassidy, Alex Summers and Darwin. Shaw attacks the government facility, killing Darwin and persuading Angel to defect. Xavier relocates the team to his own house and trains them in the use of their powers. McCoy synthesises a serum from Raven's blood in the hope of normalising their appearances, but transforms himself into more bestial form. Raven, influenced by Erik, overcomes her reluctance to appear in her inhuman shape. Shaw manipulates America and Russia into a nuclear face-off near Cuba, prompting Xavier's team to intervene. Erik defeats and kills Shaw, but the superpowers turn their missiles on the mutants. Erik holds the weapons off; Moira and Xavier intervene when he tries to turn them back on the American and Russian fleets. Erik deflects a bullet, which hits Xavier in the spine, crippling him.

Erik (now calling himself Magneto) takes over Shaw's militant mutant faction, persuading Raven (now Mystique) to join him. Xavier wipes Moira's knowledge of his special school from her mind. No longer government agents (G-Men), his pupils become X-Men.

Zookeeper

USA 2011

Director: Frank Coraci

Certificate PG 101m 44s

Given that *Zookeeper* turns on a tame fellow discovering the beast within, it's probably apposite on some level that its mishmash of slapstick, romcom and wacky fantasy is so hectic. Even so, this strenuously inane comedy from Adam Sandler's Happy Madison banner far too often mistakes shrill for funny. Long-time Sandler cohorts are on hand, from co-writer/star Kevin James, hardly stretching his bumbling everyman schtick, to director Frank Coraci (the hero's romantic travails here are recycled wholesale from Coraci's *The Wedding Singer*, 1998).

James plays the titular zookeeper, Griffin Keyes, still mooning over the shallow dreamgirl (Leslie Bibb) who, five years prior, rejected his marriage proposal. Newly determined to win her back, Griffin resolves to quit the zoo for a sexier career. But he doesn't count on the reaction of his adoring zoo animals: in a fit of separation anxiety, they reveal not only that they can talk – they're also keen to impart distinctly primal wooing tips. James has one or two inspired moments of physical comedy as he haltingly puts this advice to practical use, marking his territory in restaurant flowerbeds and wreaking havoc with unearthed alpha-male instincts.

He's supported by a wildly diverse voice cast (the film uses real animals, augmented by digital trickery) including Sylvester Stallone, Judd Apatow, Cher and Sandler; Nick Nolte in particular excels as a lugubrious gorilla. It's essentially *Cyrano* revisited, coating an utterly formulaic soft centre – once Rosario Dawson's ravishing but genuine veterinarian is introduced early on, the film's ending is sealed. The laughs are spread thin, though. In their frantically edited scenes, the animals mostly yell non sequiturs at each other, while stridency usually supplants wit for Griffin's exploits; in fact, it's Coraci's typical peripheral oddballs who prove the most amusing. It's also difficult to gauge *Zookeeper*'s audience; poised awkwardly between kids' fare and something racier, it struggles to work either way.

► **Matthew Taylor**

SYNOPSIS Griffin Keyes, a zookeeper at Boston's Franklin Park Zoo, proposes to his selfish girlfriend Stephanie, but she rejects him.

Five years later, after a chance meeting with Stephanie, Griffin resolves to win her back by finding a more glamorous job. Worried that their favourite keeper could leave, the zoo animals reveal to Griffin that they can talk – and school him in their methods of courtship. Locating his wild side, Griffin clashes with Stephanie's current boyfriend, has a night on the town with the zoo's gorilla Bernie, and causes havoc at his brother's wedding. Hoping to make Stephanie jealous, Griffin pretends to be dating zoo veterinarian Kate. The plan works; Griffin and Stephanie rekindle their relationship, and Griffin leaves the zoo to become a car salesman. However, Griffin soon tires of Stephanie's vacuity; he declines her own marriage proposal and quits the car dealership. Kate confides to a colleague that she has feelings for Griffin, and that she plans to leave the zoo for a sanctuary overseas. Realising that he has fallen for Kate, Griffin returns to the zoo but she has already left. With Bernie's help, Griffin finds Kate before she reaches the airport. The couple resume life at the zoo.



Are you fur real? Kevin James

Jennifer Eatz

CREDITS

Produced by
Todd Garner
Kevin James
Adam Sandler
Jack Giarraputo
Walt Becker
Screenplay
Nick Bakay
Rock Reuben
Kevin James
Jay Scherick
David Ronn
Story
Jay Scherick
David Ronn
Director of Photography
Michael Barrett
Film Editor
Scott Hill
Production Designer
Kirk M. Petrucci
Music
Rupert Gregson-Williams
Production Mixer
David MacMillan
Costume Designer
Mona May
Special Visual Effects and Animation
Sony Pictures
Imageworks Inc.
Imageworks India
Visual Effects
Framework Studio LA
Zero VFX LLC
Pixomondo

@Zookeeper
Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Columbia Pictures and
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Pictures present a
Broken Road/Hey
Eddie/Happy Madison
production
A film by Frank Coraci
Executive Producers
Barry Bernardi
Jeff Sussman
Charles Newirth

CAST

Kevin James
Griffin Keyes
Rosario Dawson
Kate
Leslie Bibb
Stephanie
Ken Jeong
Venom
Donnie Wahlberg
Shane
Joe Rogan
Gale
Nat Faxon
Dave
Tom Woodruff Jr
Bernie suit performer
Cher
voice of Janet the
lioness
Nick Nolte
voice of Bernie the
gorilla
Adam Sandler
voice of Donald the
monkey
Sylvester Stallone
voice of Joe the lion
Judd Apatow
voice of Barry the
elephant
Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing
9,156 ft +0 frames

CREDITS UPDATE

The reviews of these films were published in July issue but unfortunately credits were unavailable at the time of going to press.

Honey 2

USA/United
Kingdom 2011
Certificate 12A
110m 29s

CREDITS

Produced by
Paul Helleman
Written by
Blayne Weaver
Alyson Fouse
Story
Blayne Weaver
Based on characters
created by Alonzo
Brown, Kim Watson
Director of Photography
David Klein
Edited by
Paul Millsaugh
Production Designer
Jerry Fleming
Music
Sam Retzer
Tim Boland
Sound Mixer
Donovan Dear
Costume Designer
Cynthia Ann Summers

©Universal Studios
Production Company
Universal Pictures
International presents a
Marc Platt production
Executive Producer
Marc Platt

CAST

Katerina Graham
Maria Ramirez
Randy Wayne
Brandon
Seychelle Gabriel
Tina
Christopher 'War'
Martinez
Luis
Brittany Perry-Russell
Lyric
Melissa Molinaro
Carla
Beau 'Casper' Smart
Ricky
Tyler Nelson
Darnell
Gerry Bednob
Mr Kapoor
Lonette McKee
Connie Daniels

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire
9,943 ft +13 frames

Take Me Home Tonight

USA/Germany 2011
Certificate 15
97m 54s

CREDITS

Produced by
Ryan Kavanaugh
Jim Whitaker
Sarah Bowen
Screenplay
Jackie Filgo
Jeff Filgo
Based on a story by
Tophier Grace, Gordon
Kaywin
Director of Photography
Terry Stacey
Editor
Lee Haxall
Production Designer
William Arnold
Music
Trevor Horn
Sound Designer
Leslie Shtatz
Costume Designer
Carol Oditz

©Relativity Jackson,
LLC and Internationale
Filmproduktion
Blackbird Dritte GmbH
& Co. KG
Production Companies
Rogue and Imagine
Entertainment present
in association with
Relativity Media
Executive Producers
Tophier Grace
Gordon Kaywin
Dany Wolf
Tucker Tooley

CAST

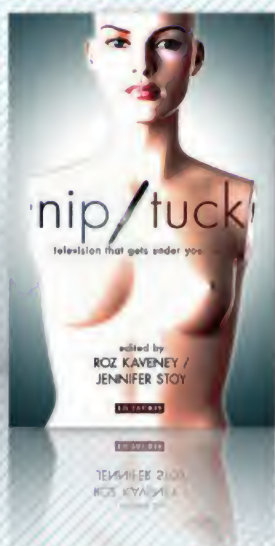
Tophier Grace
Matt Franklin
Anna Faris
Wendy Franklin
Dan Fogler
Barry Nathan
Teresa Palmer
Toni Frederick
Chris Pratt
Kyle Masterson
Michael Biehn
Bill Franklin
Lucy Punch
Shelly
Demetri Martin
Carlos
Michael Ian Black
Pete Bering
Seth Gabel
Brent
Nathalie Kelley
Beth
Candace Kroslak
Ally
Ryan Bittle
Rick Herrington

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

8,811 ft +0 frames

Read

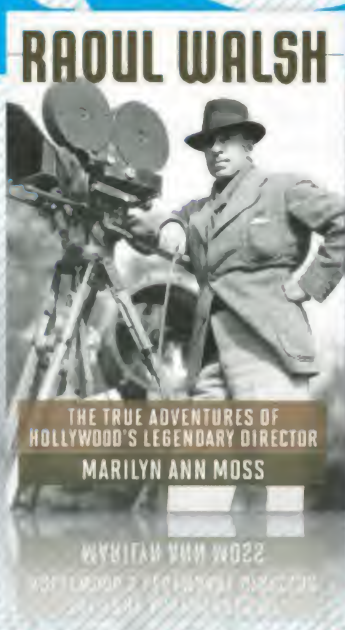


Nip/Tuck: Television That Gets Under Your Skin

Edited by Roz Kaveney and Jen Stoy, I.B. Tauris, 256pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781845118624

Promoted as a 'disturbingly perfect' and 'deeply shallow' television drama and created by Ryan Murphy, who is also behind the teen musical series *Glee*, *Nip/Tuck* has been one of the most popular and controversial shows on cable TV. Yet ironically, as this first full critical examination of *Nip/Tuck* reveals, the show is an examination of the American family and its multiple definitions, exploring the anxieties and complications of gender and sexuality, and the class issues and illusions surrounding the American dream. The book also features an interview with frequent *Nip/Tuck* director Elodie Keene, and an episode guide.

www.ibtauris.com

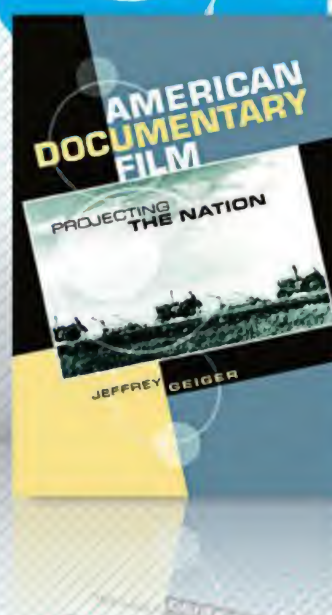


Raoul Walsh: The True Adventures of Hollywood's Legendary Director

By Marilyn Ann Moss, The University Press of Kentucky, 512pp, illustrated, hardback, £34.40, ISBN 9780813133935

Raoul Walsh (1887-1980) was known as one of Hollywood's most adventurous, iconoclastic and creative directors. He carved out an illustrious career making films that transformed the Hollywood studio yarn into a thrilling artform. Walsh belonged to that early generation of directors – along with John Ford and Howard Hawks – who worked in the fledgling film industry of the early 20th century, learning to make movies on shoestring budgets. Walsh's generation invented a Hollywood that made movies seem bigger than life itself. During his long career, he directed such heavyweights as Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Errol Flynn and Marlene Dietrich, and in 1930 he discovered future star John Wayne.

www.eurospanbookstore.com/film



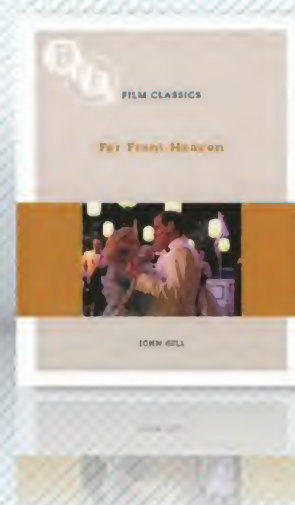
American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation

By Jeffrey Geiger, Edinburgh University Press, 288pp, illustrated, paperback, £24.99, ISBN 9780748621484

This book examines how documentary films have contributed to the American public sphere – creating a form of public space that serves as a site for community building, public expression and social innovation. Jeffrey Geiger focuses on how documentaries have been significant in creating ideas of the nation, both as an imagined space and a real place.

Moving from the dawn of cinema to the present day, this full-length study explores the extensive range and history of American non-fiction filmmaking. Combining comprehensive overviews with in-depth case studies, Geiger maps American documentary's intricate histories, detailing the impact of pre- and early cinema, travelogues, the avant garde, 1930s social documentary, propaganda, direct cinema, postmodernism and 'new' documentary.

www.euppublishing.com



Far from Heaven

By John Gill, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 112pp, illustrated, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 9781844572878

BFI Film Classics presents the first single critical study of Todd Haynes's cult classic *Far from Heaven* (2002), by John Gill. Gill provides insights into how Haynes's homage to Douglas Sirk confronts issues of race, sexuality and class in a suburban 1950s American neighbourhood.

Gill argues that the film is far more complex than just another well-dressed period pastiche and contends that Haynes's ultimate aim is to undermine the nature and notion of cinema and storytelling.

www.palgrave.com

Double trouble

Fassbinder's adaptation of the Nabokov novel 'Despair' is flawed but fascinating, writes Nick Pinkerton

Despair

Rainer Werner Fassbinder; Germany 1978; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC; 121 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

Regarding the consensus of opinion on R.W. Fassbinder's film of 'Despair', you can't improve on the following exchange recorded in Robert Katz's Fassbinder biography 'Love Is Colder Than Death', between the director and producer Peter Berling, nicknamed Mutti. Fassbinder: "If [Hanns] Eckelkamp forces me to make this movie ['Lola'] Mutti, it will be the most expensive and the worst movie I've ever made!" Berling: "You can't do that, Rainer Werner. You've already made 'Despair'."

And yet if ever there was a supergroup film it was 'Despair', which premiered at Cannes in May 1978, rush re-edited by an increasingly drug-dependent Fassbinder. Now, restored by Bavaria Media, it is available on DVD for the first time, from Olive Films. Berling was, incidentally, right about it – but even Fassbinder's failures are instructive.

'Despair' was Fassbinder's first film in English (a language he wasn't wholly fluent in), his first with a screenplay not by himself, and his first with a big budget. It starred the French actress Andréa Ferréol, the plump mistress of Marco Ferreri's 'La Grande Bouffe' (1973), and Dirk Bogarde, venturing out of semi-retirement in Provence to work with Fassbinder, whose international stardom was reaching new heights with each festival cycle. The screenplay was by Tom Stoppard, disappearing under a steadily mounting pile of playwright's awards, and was adapted from a 1934 novel by Vladimir Nabokov, who'd died as perhaps the world's most esteemed novelist while Fassbinder was filming 'Despair' in the summer of the previous year. What collected fame! And what a pair, the White Russian aesthete and the surly, leather-boy German peasant – caviar and Bavarian pretzels!

Nabokov's story, a Dostoevsky parody set in Berlin in 1930, was delivered as the literary testimony of Hermann Hermann (echoes of a future Nabokov confessor), a Russian émigré chocolate manufacturer. In its pages, Hermann preens over his facility with prose while occasionally remembering to recount his perfect crime. He begins by describing a coincidental encounter with a man, Felix, who is in every respect Hermann's physical double – though he is a foul tramp, where the narrator is a bourgeois and fastidious dandy, a man who relishes describing the stupidity of his dotting wife Lydia and her hack painter bohemian cousin Ardalion. Between Hermann's



Twin pique: Klaus Löwitsch and Dirk Bogarde in 'Despair'

If ever there was a supergroup film it was 'Despair'. What collected fame!

convolutions and digressions, the shape of his crime becomes gradually visible: he plans to murder his double, leaving the corpse to be discovered and taken for his own, and begin a new life with the insurance money that his wife will deliver – something of Hammett's Flitcraft parable here.

All of this is undone by the fact that Hermann is mad and has grossly overestimated the likeness between himself and his 'double'. Until this knowledge becomes finally inescapable, Hermann admires his new role as an artist, his masterpiece-murder to be completed by his literary statement, and imagines his future public: "The French discern mirages of sodomy in my partiality for a vagabond..."

The approach taken by Fassbinder is, then, rather French. There are no new scenes invented between Hermann (Bogarde) and Felix (Klaus Löwitsch), but when Felix draws close to his potential benefactor in a clandestine park meeting and talks of 'friendship', the tease of a hustler is clear. Later, when Hermann surreptitiously studies Felix's sturdy body for betraying marks, one sees the gloomy, longing Bogarde of 'Death in Venice' (1971) – whereas Nabokov's Hermann, foremost a narcissist, consciously betrays little but fascinated disgust at his desecrated 'döppelgänger'. (However, Bogarde's scenes with Löwitsch

betray a tenderness everywhere else suppressed.) This suggests another important point: with the switch from Nabokov's first person to Stoppard and Fassbinder's principally literal-minded third person, it's immediately clear that Herrmann's plan is delusional, being obvious from their first meeting that any resemblance between Bogarde and Löwitsch is superficial at best.

The tension created by the unreliable narration hisses out, and the now hollowed 'Despair' is stuffed with smothering deco decor and the figure-skating camerawork of 'Chinese Roulette' (1976). Bogarde, doing a Russian accent, is smug and imperial, purring lines like "Intelligence would take the bloom off your carnality" to Ferréol, who is unkindly photographed, forever stuffing her face with choccy-woccies and cuckolding her husband quite explicitly with the cousin (Volker Spengler, henna-haired and jelly-bellied). Hermann's final abjection is raw and palpable, but by then it's impossible to muster attention.

Nabokov, in a later-written foreword, offered that "'Despair', in kinship with the rest of my books, has no social comment to make," while Fassbinder's 'Despair' is set outside Hermann's headspace, in a real historical milieu. Filmed on period sets in Munich, leftovers from Ingmar Bergman's 'The Serpent's Egg', the movie is sprinkled erratically with allusions to the rise of Nazism. Hermann listens to talk about the Wall Street Crash and the Treaty of Versailles from his underling Müller (Peter Kern), who reports to work one day in a brownshirt uniform. Hermann's foundering business is an afterthought in the novel, but for the

film he becomes one of the industrialist protagonists of late Fassbinder, analysing samples in his boxed-in office atop a factory with a Willie Wonka purple sign.

The emphasis is not uncharacteristic. "Work may be the only subject there is," the director said in 1971. "We live in a society where people must work to make a living, and many of my characters can't stand their work. As a result, they have nothing to sustain them and are doomed." From Fassbinder's comments on 'Despair', it's clear that he read the novel, quite reductively, as the story of a businessman's grandiose midlife breakdown: "When Hermann, the manufacturer, realises that he can't expect anything more from life, he throws himself into the arms of madness..." A murderer because of circumstances, Hermann becomes upmarket kin to the killers in Fassbinder's 'Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?' (1970) and 'Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven' (1975).

Despite Nabokov's passing, 'Despair' was dedicated to Unica Zürn, Van Gogh and Antonin Artaud (whose book on Van Gogh has a title near to Fassbinder's enlarged heart: 'The Man Suicided by Society'). A madman and two self-slaughters are no company for a 78-year-old cosmopolitan gentryman, quietly slipping away in a Swiss hospital. The filmed 'Despair' flattered neither Nabokov's subtleties nor Fassbinder's coarseness (Fassbinder later found much more amenable company cruising with Jean Genet in 'Querelle') but it does contain one great irony: you see, it's the story of an artist who thought he'd found his double, while everyone else could see he was courting his opposite...

NEW RELEASES

L'Age d'or

Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí; France/Spain 1930; BFI Dual Format DVD and Blu-ray/Region 0; Certificate 15; 63 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.19:1; Features: selected scenes commentary for 'L'Age d'or' by Robert Short, 'Un chien andalou' 1960 restoration with original restoration score, alternative 'Un chien andalou' score, commentary for 'Un chien andalou' by Robert Short, 'A propósito de Buñuel' documentary, filmed introduction by Robert Short (DVD only), essay booklet

Film: Why have Buñuel and Dalí's sublime and notorious offerings endured where other surrealist film has faded to footnote status in cinema history? Robert Short, whose lengthy and invaluable insights – delivered in audio commentaries, essay and filmed introduction – wrap round this covetable release like screen-studies scaffolding, is in no doubt. *L'Age d'or* and *Un chien andalou* (both included here in spanking HD) are a reaction against the wilfully incoherent Dadaism that preceded them, as well as a surrealist stiletto aimed at repressive social mechanisms. It's the story structure and the conventional cinematography in both titles that allow them to seduce the spectator, and then to tease, assault and astound with sight gags, startling eroticism and vicious social commentary.

Watching *Un chien andalou*, its packed, ceaselessly provocative action and indelibly startling images (that chilling death's-head moth, that armpit-morphing mouth) seem occasionally too fleet for the detailed Freudian forensics of the commentary, which runs three minutes longer than the film. But *L'Age d'or*, adding Marxism to the mix and reflecting Buñuel's fierce anti-clericalism rather than Dalí's self-styled 'authentic sacrilege', is vividly illuminated by this package's expert unpicking of selected scenes. Though a new generation of viewers can read unaided the fervid fetishes of the street posters or the famous statue toe-sucking, a deft decoding enables the fiercely transgressive epilogue, which teams de Sade's *Salô, or the 120*



Faccia a faccia Sergio Sollima's second Italian western is one of the more politically astute and psychologically intriguing examples of the genre

Days of Sodom with Jesus Christ, to deliver the proper sting in the tail. **Discs:** Both transfers are in fine shape (literally, in the case of *L'Age d'or*, restored to its original aspect ratio of 1.19:1). *Un chien andalou* can be watched with either the Buñuel-decreed 1960 score or Mordant Music's pleasing, newly commissioned electronica. The hefty documentary *A propósito de Buñuel* is a considerable boon, though the essay booklet is on the lean side despite the welcome inclusion of the original 'Manifesto of the Surrealists concerning *L'Age d'or*', which identifies the film's social function as urging the oppressed to satisfy their hunger for destruction. This film's great, let's slash the seats. (KS)

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt

Fritz Lang; US 1956; Exposure/Region 2; Certificate PG; 80 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: trailer

Film: François Truffaut wrote of Fritz Lang's last Hollywood film: "The critics were outraged by the plot, but it should not have been surprising from a man whom the world, Nazism, war, deportation, McCarthyism et cetera confirmed as a rebel."

Douglas Morrow's screenplay for *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* is indeed on the tricky side, with carpets being pulled from beneath carpets before the final sleight in the very last seconds of the film. But thematically Lang is on familiar ground as he explores vengeance, misogyny and fate in a drama that seems, at first glance, to be an exploration of issues surrounding the death penalty. The

film stars Dana Andrews, who excels in noir-ish yarns of this variety – he has the good looks of the conventional leading man but there's also a saturnine quality about him. Patrick McGilligan's biography of Lang suggests the director found it hard to cope with Andrews's heavy drinking, but arguably the boozing added to his brooding, slightly neurotic manner on camera.

His character here is novelist Tom Garrett, a man who shares some of the same traits as *Mad Men*'s Don Draper – and like Draper, he has a hidden biography that he's desperate to keep suppressed. When Garrett's soon-to-be father-in-law, a newspaper publisher, persuades him to frame himself for a murder, the idea is that they'll hoodwink the district attorney into seeking the death penalty and at the last minute will reveal that it's all been a set-up, demonstrating how easily an innocent man can be sent to Death Row.

There's little of the formal flamboyance we sometimes associate with Lang – mid-1950s America is a long way from UFA Studios of the 1920s. With its multiple twists, *Reasonable Doubt* anticipates the endless TV courtroom dramas that would be made in subsequent years, though there's a bleakness here that you don't find in the film's many small-screen successors. **Disc:** Image quality is inconsistent, with occasional blemishes. (GM)

Cross of Iron

Sam Peckinpah; US 1977; Optimum/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 127 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: 'Passion & Poetry' – Sam Peckinpah's War; featurettes, interviews

Film: "The best anti-war movie ever made" in Orson Welles's estimation, *Cross of Iron* was Sam Peckinpah's last coherent film. It's largely set in Russia in 1943 as the Germans flee from the Soviet army after their attempts to "destroy the

myth of Russian invincibility" fall apart. The storytelling is vivid, lurid, cynical and at times almost grotesque in its violence: when soldiers are shot, we see their innards spilling out, and there are plenty of the slow-motion shootouts that became the director's trademark. However, there is also an undertow of lyricism here, and one of the film's fascinations is the way it combines exploitation elements with formal and artistic ambition. Peckinpah clearly saw it as a morality tale about the pity and squalor of war, and he wanted to show how "war feels and war smells" (the rationale given by one mud-encrusted soldier for not washing is that "natural body oils combined with dirt can keep you waterproof"). And as in Sam Fuller's *The Big Red One* (1980), there's also an emphasis on the plight of children.

James Coburn plays the everyman hero – a German sergeant who (like Lee Marvin in Fuller's film) will do anything for his men but has unbridled contempt for his commanding officers, especially Maximilian Schell's arrogant Prussian, who has archaic ideas about war and honour and is desperate to win the Iron Cross. "What shall we do when we lose the war?" James Mason's weak-willed, vacillating German officer asks pitifully at one point. "Prepare for the next one," is the very curt reply.

When it comes to behind-the-scenes stories of chaos and acrimony, Peckinpah never disappoints. His relationship with his producers was invariably deeply antagonistic, and as the excellent documentary *Passion & Poetry* included on the Blu-ray makes clear, he was at odds with his cheese-paring German producer (better known for making porn movies than war epics). Peckinpah's old partner Katy Haber recalls how he deliberately cast the producer's wife in the most thankless role in the movie. His old colleagues reminisce on camera about his often erratic behaviour, but at the same time they're awestruck by his artistry. **Disc:** The film, which has been digitally restored, is handsomely presented. (GM)

Faccia a faccia

Sergio Sollima; Italy/Spain 1967; Eureka/Region 2; Certificate 12; 107 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 anamorphic; Features: Sergio Sollima interview, two trailers, booklet

Film: Long underrated in Britain thanks to the lack of a decent version (all previous UK releases were both cut and dubbed), Sergio Sollima's second Italian western after *The Big Gundown* (1966) is one of the more politically astute and psychologically intriguing examples of the genre. Outlaw Beau Bennet (Tomas Milian) belatedly develops a conscience after kidnapping convalescent history professor Brad Fletcher (Gian Maria Volonté) – who is in turn fatally seduced by the allure of power and notoriety. Given the revivifying effect the bank jobs and train hold-ups have on him – quite aside from Ennio Morricone on scorching form – it's easy to see where he's coming from. **Disc:** Materials problems forced the



Hand to mouth:
'L'Age d'or'

NEW RELEASES

← cancellation of a Blu-ray and an English soundtrack, but this DVD of the original Italian release version has turned out better than expected. The source print is in excellent condition, and lip-reading confirms that Italian is the closest thing to a *versione originale* (given that the entire soundtrack was post-dubbed regardless of language). An interview with the still sprightly Sollima reveals that his two leads hated each other on sight ("An ideal situation!"), and a booklet essay by Italian westerns expert Howard Hughes provides useful context. (MB)

The Halfway House

Basil Dearden; UK 1944; Optimum/
Region 2; Certificate PG; 92 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Film: This Ealing oddity combines a ghost story with WWII propaganda and a time-slip fantasy reminiscent of the work of the then fashionable J.B. Priestley. It's based on a 1940 play by Denis Ogden, which George Orwell described as "the most fearful tripe", though it was extensively altered in its passage to the screen, turning a piece that originally didn't mention the war at all into something far more topical.

This particular halfway house, situated in the rolling Welsh valleys, acts as a temporary refuge for those recovering from divorce, ill-health and

bereavement, but it's also a supernatural staging-post (run by real-life father and daughter Mervyn and Glynis Johns) which offers its visitors the chance to rethink their actions over the year since the summer of 1942. It's much more didactic than Ealing's better-known *Dead of Night* (1945) and more closely tied to its very specific era, which may explain its comparative neglect. A fair amount of disbelief-suspension is needed to process variable performances, with the difference between genuine and adopted Welsh accents being especially glaring. But as a snapshot of the national mindset at the time, it's often fascinating – not least for tackling contentious issues such as war profiteering and Irish neutrality alongside more conventional flag-waving concerns.

Disc: It's unlikely the film has looked this pristine since its original release. (MB)

A High Wind in Jamaica

Alexander Mackendrick; US 1965; Eureka/
Region 2; Certificate PG; 104 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: original
US and Spanish trailers

Film: Based on the bestselling novel by Richard Hughes, *A High Wind in Jamaica* tells the story of a group of Victorian-era British children who are accidentally transferred on to a pirate boat, where they encounter the fierce



Centre stage: Anna May Wong in 'Tiger Bay'

but faintly ludicrous Captain Chavez (Anthony Quinn). Unable to return the children and unwilling to kill them, Chavez keeps them on board – a decision that upsets first mate Zac (James Coburn, all Flint-like strut and swagger) and the superstitious crew.

The drunken, lecherous buccaneers, constantly talking murder and mutiny in muttered Spanish, are initially threatening to the outwardly prim children but, as in all good pirate yarns, the kids quickly become resilient. In fact, the children (one of whom is played by a young Martin Amis) prove quite callous in the face of tragedy, and it soon becomes clear that it's the pirates who have the most to fear.

The film was made by director Alexander Mackendrick in the mid-1960s, after *Sammy Going South* (which also recently gained its first British home-viewing release). In both films he explores childhood amorality – but captures it perfectly here, especially in Deborah Baxter's performance as Emily, the brilliantly defiant 12-year-old who manages to turn the heart of Chavez's cynical criminal and then lead him, almost willingly, to his downfall.

Disc: Douglas Slocombe's CinemaScope images are given a new high-definition transfer, but the extras are limited to two theatrical trailers that differ only in language. The Spanish and English versions are the languages of Chavez's crew and, presumably, 20th Century Fox's target territories in 1965. (DC)

Java Head/Tiger Bay

Thorold Dickinson and J. Walter Ruben/
J. Elder Wills; UK 1934/34; Optimum
Releasing/Region 2; Certificate PG;
80/64 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Films: Anna May Wong's late 1920s excursion into European film resulted in some of her best roles, most notably in *Piccadilly* (1929). This pair of Ealing Studios curiosities, shot on her return to England in the early 1930s, admittedly dodge the 'Dragon Lady' or 'Blossom' stereotypes that dogged her in the US, but seem thin gruel after her triumph in

Shanghai Express (1932). The crinolined melodrama *Java Head* is remembered nowadays, if at all, for featuring the only interracial kiss Wong was ever allowed on screen, as the Chinese trophy wife of John Loder's clean-cut merchant sea captain in 1850s Bristol. With the exception of Ralph Richardson's fussy, opium-smuggling brother-in-law, the performances are either ripely over-egged or squeakily thin, and the film, despite its gentle pleas for racial tolerance, is fixated on the dangerous allure of the east. But Wong, enthroned at the film's centre, gives a fascinatingly charismatic and dignified performance, even in the rather lurid love-triangle finale.

Tiger Bay, a cheap and cheerful quota quickie in which she plays a nightclub owner menaced by local thugs in a South American backwater, similarly loads Wong with elaborate Chinese costumes and *mise en scène*, placing her like a rare bird amid a welter of Cockney comic character actors and a pallid pair of young lovers. Yet her understated playing, and her extraordinary facility to dominate the frame, trump her indifferent material again. Seeing her face off sternly against Henry Victor's laughing heavy, one wonders what she might have achieved in projects that allowed her to be truly expressive rather than headily exotic. **Discs:** While the black-and-white transfers are adequate, sound quality is poor, with small but noticeable amounts of distortion in the dialogue. (KS)

The Kremlin Letter

John Huston; US 1969; Eureka/Region 2;
Certificate 18; 116 minutes; Aspect Ratio
2.35:1 anamorphic

Film: This Cold War spy thriller is an even bleaker study of the absolute moral bankruptcy of those purporting to represent their people than the already wrist-slitting *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965). Despite the title communiqué's apparent importance (it may prevent or trigger World War III,



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depending on who gets hold of it), it's a largely meaningless macguffin, an excuse for assorted spies of various nationalities (American, British, Russian, Chinese), generations (grizzled Richard Boone, clean-cut Patrick O'Neal) and sexual proclivities (predatory drag queen George Sanders, all-girl-catfight fan Nigel Green, S&M addict Bibi Andersson, hesitant virgin Barbara Parkins) to play elaborate double-crossing games with each other, many of which prove fatal. Orson Welles and Max von Sydow's Russians embody the internecine atmosphere, their ability to destroy each other's lives not quite restraining them from revealing mutual loathing in otherwise polite social gatherings. Huston's absolute cynicism (the ending is a particular gut-punch) made the film a notorious critical and commercial flop – but it's easy to see why Jean-Pierre Melville adored it. **Disc:** An excellent transfer of the US release version, fractionally shorter than the export cut – though it only seems to be missing a two-minute detour to the Bolshoi. (MB)

Laila

George Schnéevoigt; Norway 1929; Flicker Alley/Region O NTSC; 145 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: restoration documentary, historical essay, vintage advertisements, actor's diary entries, digital photo album

Film: Set entirely in Sápmi, the northern Scandinavian area occupied by the nomadic Sami (otherwise and derogatorily known as Lapps), this majestic Norwegian melodrama recalls and bests contemporary sagas from Griffith and Sjöström, and yet outside Norway it has been all but forgotten.

The 19th-century story unrolls in classic tradition right on the border between the 'civilised' Norwegians with their churches and trading posts, and the Arctic wilderness of the Sami and their teeming reindeer herds. Adapting a novel from the 1880s, Schnéevoigt (who shot several films for Carl Dreyer) adores Victorian cliché but avoids stereotype in this story of a 'white' girl lost by her parents and then found and raised by a wealthy Sami chieftain and his wild manservant (who, charmingly, grow old together as her twin fathers).

Grown into a vivacious, hot-tempered teen, Laila (Mona Mårtenson) finds herself the apex in a love triangle between her foster brother and a store-owner who (though she doesn't know it) is her cousin. The racial tension between the two peoples brews hotly behind every scene, with the childlike heroine, decked out in spectacular white reindeer-pelt ensembles, stuck in between, presaging scads of similar settlers-versus-Native Americans and colonials-versus-Indians pulp dramas since, but proving only that the borderlands between natives and encroaching societies share the same dilemmas, regardless of territory.

There's a plague, a tundra race between reindeer-sleighs and wolves, a canoe chase down a waterfall, and

Memory bliss

Michael Atkinson marvels at the swoonsome beauty of 'Szindbád', a revived gem of 1970s Hungarian cinema

Szindbád

Zoltán Huszárik; Hungary 1971; Second Run/Region O PAL; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 anamorphic; Features: Peter Strickland video interview, Michael Brooke booklet essay

International film culture is not quite a shrinking global village just yet – we can easily be surprised by what films command the love and respect of their native viewerships, which often don't obey the taste dictates of Cannes or the BFI or Hollywood. Sure, the Japanese rather mundanely hold 'The Seven Samurai' as their number one, but the Hungarian cultural community, known for contrariness, selected their country's best in 2000, amid the rich troves of Jancsó, Mészároses, Makks, Szabós and Tarrs, and arrived at a film few outside Hungary had seen or heard about, Zoltán Huszárik's 'Szindbád', made in 1971. (The Czechs did something similar in their championing of Vláčil's 'Marketa Lazarová' – also on DVD from Second Run – but then again, how many Hungarians or Czechs retain front-brain intimacy with 'The Italian Job'?)

A layered, rum-soaked tortoise of a movie, adapted from stories by the revered-at-home, proudly untranslatable author Gyula Krúdy, 'Szindbád' comes off virtually as an anti-Jancsó – in the Art Film heyday, elaborate tracking and widescreen compositions and brooding long shots were something of a standard, especially in Eastern Europe. But 'Szindbád', seemingly as a riposte to Jancsó's contemporaneous monumentalism, is a montage frenzy, evoking the hero's dying moments via a hectic, timeline-skittering assemblage of impressions, memories, microscopic details, abrupt zooms and free associations, many of them only a few frames long, and all of them dripping with regret.

Krúdy's semi-autobiographical protagonist, named after the 'Arabian Nights' swashbuckler, is a fin-de-siècle womaniser and libertine, and as the writer is often defined as Hungary's Proust and/or Joyce (every European country seemed to have one in the early century), his adventures are highly self-conscious and philosophical, given to epicurean ideas and Romantic debates about fate and love and meaning. Huszárik and his co-screenwriter János Tóth took the volumes of original tales and scrambled them into an Alzheimer's-y ricochet, weaving the character's adult life out of stray threads and scraps of memory, beginning with massive close-ups (of embers, icons, food



Times regained: 'Szindbád'

A beautiful film, alive with sun-scorched textures, painterly but not simply pretty

oil, flames, babbling water) that are all keys to remembering particular incidents in his life. The fragmented incidents themselves are almost all liaisons and rendezvous, seductions and debates about matters of the heart, with the eponymous rake (Zoltán Latinovits) sullenly strolling around the landscapes and 19th-century rooms in a more or less constant state of romantic exhaustion.

Huszárik's strategy is of a piece both with the film's time and place and with Krúdy's zeitgeist – a modernist postmodernism dictated by the vagaries of subliminal connectedness; often a meal or a flower or a woman's face will trigger a memory at another point in Szindbád's history, and sometimes only the amount of grey in his hair cues us as to when it might've taken place. Likewise, we are in something like a state of suspension, sometimes forgetting and then reminding ourselves of the film's diegetic 'now' – Szindbád dying, glimpsed at the beginning set adrift on the snowy hills in a cart – even as the tumult of images and women and set pieces skitter on, rarely bothering to evoke the consciousness to which we are privy. It is Proustian in spirit, more so perhaps even than Raúl Ruiz's 'Time Regained' (1999).

Appropriately, it's also a beautiful film, alive with the earthen, gritty, sun-scorched textures of the 1960s and 1970s, painterly but not simply pretty, with a late-evening pilgrimage by

candlelight that settles in your memory, and possibly the loveliest ice-skating sequence ever put on film. For all its narrative antipathy, Huszárik's movie conjures up a densely imagined place and time; 'Szindbád' is nothing if not a deft dose of subjective time-travel. Given its structure, which finds the actors and drops of rain equally interesting, performance is only a matter of presence and impression, but for Hungarians there seem to be fewer pleasures riper and more powerful than the ultra-cool Latinovits, the culture's combined Jack Nicholson/Zbigniew Cybulski, who like Cybulski ended his life under a train, igniting a pop-romantic martyrdom legend that persists today and for which 'Szindbád' is a key totem.

The well of pivotal, generational wonders that emerged from the 1960s-70s New Wave period may be, it seems, bottomless, and viewing them as they're unearthed for us, aching with youthful invention so many years later, is itself a special brand of cinephilia. As it did with 'Marketa Lazarová', Second Run pulls Huszárik's beloved touchstone out of its exclusively Magyar shrine with a spit-perfect restoration and transfer; what I'd seen on a cruddy Kino VHS decades ago, which left me scratching my scalp, bursts into life on DVD. The ancillary goodies are homegrown British (perhaps a Hungarian perspective would've been useful), comprised first of an epic and exhaustive essay by Michael Brooke, exploring Krúdy's and Huszárik's histories as well as the film's, and a video interview with 'Katalin Varga' writer/director Peter Strickland, who is only an articulate fan but who knows his way around both the New Wave aesthetics and Eastern European territories.

Unhappy bedfellows

Tim Lucas finds Joseph Losey once again exploring the theme of an interloper turning a well-ordered life upside down

The Romantic Englishwoman

Joseph Losey; UK/France 1975; Kino Lorber/Region 1 DVD/Region A Blu-ray NTSC; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: stills gallery, trailers for other Kino Lorber titles

"I've got very little to say about it, actually," Joseph Losey said when Michel Ciment enquired about this picture. "It's a remake, essentially. It deals with an impossible domestic situation in which a bourgeois life encases people and they don't get out of it, and to that extent it's 'The Prowler', 'Accident', 'Eve'."

Adapted from a 1971 novel by Thomas Wiseman, *The Romantic Englishwoman* was reportedly revised from Wiseman's original script by Tom Stoppard "into something that it was possible for [Losey] to make into a picture". Losey's hiring of Stoppard is revealing because, in a sense, the film is a subtle, dead-on send-up not only of the sort of films Losey made during his years of European exile, but of foreign film pretensions in general ("I'm so sick of foreign films, aren't you?" gripes one character).

The lead characters are Lewis Fielding (Michael Caine), a bad but successful British novelist; Thomas (Helmut Berger), an Austrian gigolo; and Elizabeth (Glenda Jackson), the rather cold, blank wife inexplicably caught between them. As the somewhat metafictional story goes, Elizabeth meets Thomas while holidaying in Baden-Baden, ostensibly for a health cure but more likely to invite the possibility of a romantic affair. In the meantime, the intensely controlling Lewis ("I've been calling you for half an hour, where were you?") – stuck at home with his toddler son, French au pair and blank sheets of paper – is encouraged by a producer friend to write a film script, "a psychological study of the New Woman". "Why not turn it into a thriller?" Lewis suggests, at which point we cut back to Baden-Baden, where Thomas is shown secreting bags of heroin under the roof slates of the hotel, stealing someone's room-service supper and genteelly luring Elizabeth into an elevator tryst.

Every scene taking place outside the Fielding home might well be (and, if we judge by the writing, should be) the product of Lewis's paranoid yet playfully novelistic imagination, in a manner recalling John Gielgud's literary lampooning of his family in Alain Resnais's *Providence* (1977); Elizabeth and Thomas are elaborately, fantastically dressed in complementary blacks and whites, and throwaway shots of people getting in and out of cars are



Trouble and strife: Michael Caine and Glenda Jackson in *'The Romantic Englishwoman'*

staged in front of pointlessly rapturous shots of the Côte d'Azur. Where the film goes almost ruinously astray is with the inserts of a few unmistakably ludicrous dialogue scenes between Jackson and Berger, usually naked in palatial settings, numbingly speaking dullard lines that no self-respecting writer (other than Fielding) would sign. With these scenes in place, the viewer has almost no option other than to accept that the other early scenes between Thomas and Elizabeth actually took place.

The film gets its second wind when Elizabeth receives a letter – which Lewis, like a good jealous husband, intercepts – from Thomas, whose loss of his heroin cache in a rainstorm has painted a target on his back. Needing a place to hide out, he professes to be a poet and an admirer of Lewis's work, and begs an invitation to tea. Amused, but also bloody-mindedly determined to know the truth of what really happened in Baden-Baden, Lewis invites the debonair leech to dinner, to stay the weekend, and finally to become his secretary. As in *'The Servant'* (1963), the hired help slowly but surely becomes the ruler of the household.

Caine has some superb scenes (especially his drunken attempt to seduce Nathalie Delon at a work-related dinner), but no character in *'The Romantic Englishwoman'* is at all likeable, and it must surely be the most comatose of 'thrillers'. That said, Stoppard gives it a sense of the bizarre that at least somewhat compensates for its lack of a more overt sense of humour. The scene of Lewis and Elizabeth's happy and

Lewis invites the debonair leech to dinner, to stay the weekend, and finally to become his secretary

healthfully sexual reunion on her return from the spa elasticates humour into oneiric absurdity as their lovemaking on the lawn of their estate is grazed by the headlights of a homecoming neighbour, who finds this a suitable opportunity for an over-the-hedge chat. (Indeed, moments like these make the scenes Lewis imagines that much less distinguishable from reality.)

In other memorably oddball moments, Thomas explains his real line of work to one character by saying, more truthfully than it seems, "I'm in the delivery business... and sometimes I deliver things," and the Fieldings' serious bedtime discussion of their marital discontent is offset by the two of them reading copies of *'The Goon Show Scripts'*. It may be nothing more than an editorial snafu, but I personally find it very funny that, after the Fieldings' ignored young son is saved from falling off a high window ledge, the au pair is sacked and then his parents go back to ignoring him, to the extent that the moppet literally vanishes from the remainder of the picture. The director, hardly prone to Hitchcockian cameos, ambles through a scene at 77:46. The supporting cast includes Kate Nelligan as Elizabeth's gossip-columnist friend, Michael Lonsdale as a man after Thomas, and Eric Rohmer favourite Béatrice Romand as the au pair.

Kino Lorber's anamorphic DVD (the film is also available for the first time on Blu-ray) makes use of a lovely high-definition master that yields all sorts of interesting textural details, from a location exterior where snowfall is visible only during patches of backlighting to an unfortunate complexion problem that seems to come and go on one side of Ms Jackson's face. On various bookstore shelves and racks, we can also see some of the imaginary Lewis Fielding's imaginary novels, *'Cloud Cover'* and *'Mr Otis Returns'* among them. Judging by their Magritte-like covers, they can't be as bad as they're cracked up to be.

more – all of it deliberately staged and framed to exploit the grand, rocky, snowy Norwegian landscapes. The vistas are awesome and eloquently used, but it's the paternal angst of Laila's two devoted foster fathers (non-Sami actors Peter Malberg and Trygve Larsen) – weathered, pre-civilised men of the Arctic who nevertheless weep and fume openly with grief and worry for the sprite of a girl they've claimed as their own – that gives the film its heartbeat.

Disc: A welcome restoration from Nordisk and the National Library of Norway, with a sterling transfer and a handful of contextual supplements that are strictly historical. (MA)

The Miners' Hymns

Bill Morrison; UK 2010; BFI/Region 2; Certificate U; 50 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: Dolby Digital Surround option (448 kbps), highlights from live performances in Durham Cathedral, interview with Morrison and composer Jóhann Jóhannsson, trailers, booklet

Film: Referring to *Decasia* (2002), his experimentalist compilation of decaying cellulose-nitrate-based found footage, Bill Morrison said, "I was always seeking out instances where the image was still putting up a struggle, fighting off the inexorability of its demise but not yet having succumbed." Retrospectively, and in the face of the class war against British miners, that quote might be applied to Morrison's latest found-footage piece, in which 'the image' is that of the coalface worker, his family and his community. Dirge, requiem and a chronological document of historical significance, *The Miners' Hymns* (named after the hymn tune 'Gresford', commemorating the 1934 Wrexham mining disaster) is an intensely emotional experience.

It was primarily culled from multiple hours of archival material, ranging from Mitchell and Kenyon's Edwardian scene of miners leaving a colliery after a day's shift to BBC news coverage of the Battle of Orgreave during the 1984 strike. It focuses on the north-east – two fresh sequences feature colour aerial photography of Sunderland collieries that were effaced and redeveloped – but it's by no means parochial, speaking to the entire industrial proletariat and its survivors.

Like *Decasia*, *The Miners' Hymns* is slowed to the point of anthropological scrutiny (images of men descending into the shafts, hacking at the glittering seams and shovelling and sifting the coal are grimly ritualistic) and eschews speech. Whereas *Decasia* was accompanied by Michael Gordon's post-minimalist music, *The Miners' Hymns* is edited to a brass and pipe organ score by the Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson, suggested by colliery bands. The film was projected in Durham Cathedral and accompanied by the music as part of last year's BRASS festival; those present must have been especially moved by the ghostly procession of bands with their elaborate banners entering the cathedral on one of

the 1920s gala days that demonstrated communal pride and solidarity.

Jóhansson's score is threnodic, conferring a sombreness on Morrison's depiction of a livelihood that may have been unrelentingly harsh and dangerous but sustained millions until it was destroyed. As Lee Hall, writer of *Billy Elliot* and the play of *The Pitmen Painters*, notes: "There is no romance in the history of mining." However, there are strikingly lyrical moments in some scenes that Morrison includes in this elegy – a woman in a ragged shawl stooping to gather coal from a beach (redolent of the wife in *Man of Aran*, 1934), boys from different eras and their dogs playing on what is possibly the same slag heap. Most indelible is the timeworn visage of an elderly woman, a miner's wife, widow or mother, averting her eyes from the fascinated camera before it pans on to two younger women in sunglasses in what looks like an hour of mourning. It is the faces one remembers.

Disc: Extras include interviews with Morrison and Jóhansson, and highlights from live premiere performances in Durham Cathedral. (GF)



The Miners' Hymns Dirge, requiem and a document of historical significance, Bill Morrison's film is an intensely emotional experience

more taciturn pilot stuck in a storm, Helen Hayes is his anxious wife on the ground, Myrna Loy is the anxious wife of another pilot, etc. Not a single character seems to actually be South American in any way. Director Clarence Brown (with, it's safe to assume, Selznick's prodding) emphasises the visuals, fortifying the ground scenes with gorgeous pre-Wellesian shadowplay and in-depth compositions, and letting his aerial cinematographers bask in some authentically breathtaking above-the-clouds imagery.

But face it: we don't look to the assembly-line matinee product of the early 1930s for masterpieces or accomplishments in story construction – this is a cataract of nostalgic bliss, a let's-get-lost black-and-white envisagement of silk gowns and leather flying suits, giant wall maps and pre-Code *double entendres*, hulking radios and dangerously threadbare technology, primitive superimpositions (a plane's 'shadow' laid rather beguilingly over landscapes of grazing sheep) and toy miniatures. The special atmosphere of being in a plane at night – the menacing

quiet, the suspension, the listening – becomes how we watch the movie now, in a transported daze. In 1933 this was exotic cinema-as-adventure-travel but today it's only more so, a visit to the intoxicating pop past as vivid and lovely as a museum dedicated to our grandparents' daydreams.

Disc: The supplements are merely two MGM shorts from the time – a cartoon and a Pete Smith 'specialty' – but the newly restored feature comes in one of the most pristine editions of a pre-war Hollywood film we've ever seen. (MA)

People on Sunday

Robert Siodmak/Fred Zinnemann/
Edgar G. Ulmer; Germany 1930;
Criterion/Region 1 NTSC; 73 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: new
interviews and documentary, two new
scores, Eugen Shufftan short 'Ins Blaue
hinein', essay by scholar Noah Isenberg

Film: 'A film without actors', this entrancing, quietly radical artefact of European silent cinema's last hours takes a Vertovian stance towards capturing urban life while mixing in fictive juice, and there isn't another film quite as casually embracing documentary lyricism and detail-stuffed micro-narrative until Morris Engel and the early French New Wave.

The film was conceived and crafted less as a professional project than an experimental, minimalist lark, a sun-drenched afternoon gambol among friends – the friends being Robert and Curt Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, Fred Zinnemann, Billy Wilder, art director-busybody Rochus Gliese and cameraman Eugen Shufftan, all of whom pitched in as a gang regardless of their eventual credits, and the upshot is singularly natural, relaxed, intimate and serene. The band of brothers behind the camera all went on to illustrious and widely varied careers, but anyone

looking for auteurist threads in the weave will likely search in vain. This is a snapshot of a kind of filmmaking – focusing on two semi-unsavoury fellows and the two girls they lure into having a picnic on an otherwise uneventful Sunday – that pre-dates, at least for its participants, notions of industry and ambition.

As in Engel's *Little Fugitive* (1953) and thousands of indies since, the film often finds its protagonists on busy street corners, 'acting' amid an oblivious throng; the quartet, all non-pros 'playing' themselves, settle around the Nikolassee beach area outside Berlin and snack, nap, swim, argue and brood as life goes on around them. The poignancy of a Germany captured in its idleness, in the long afternoon of the fading Weimar 'Golden Era' before the rise of Nazism, generates its own melancholy, but the filmmakers have a fabulous collective eye and ardour for their human landscape. Still, it's not a film rich in conscientiously poetic moments – everything, from the workmen to the boats to the naked picnicking children cavorting in the sun, is equal and beautiful and worthy of their camera-time. When the film gently reaches out for an emotional visual moment it's a breather: as one of the cads naps in the grass canoodling with one girl under his right arm, the other girl dozes curled up with his left, and we cut to a looming close-up of the sleeper, pressing her face happily into his open hand. It's hard not to conclude that Eric Rohmer loved this film to death; certainly, Renoir (who appeared in a film Gliese made in France the same year) knew it well, and the expansive, gentle tone of his work after 1930 may have been a result.

Disc: Typically beautiful Criterion transfer. The supplements, particularly the Shufftan short (more films are always the best DVD extras) and Gerald Koll's 2000 German TV documentary, are fascinating. (MA)

Rififi

Jules Dassin; France 1955; Arrow Academy
Dual Format DVD and Blu-ray/Region B
(Blu-ray)/Region 2 (DVD); Certificate 12;
118/113 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1;
Features: Ginette Vincendeau
introduction, Jules Dassin interview
and Q&A, trailer, booklet

Film: Despite the risk of overfamiliarity as a result of being as influential (ie repeatedly 'homaged') as its near-contemporary *Les Diaboliques*, Jules Dassin's jewel-heist thriller comes up gleaming. Its famous mid-section, the wordless, fetishistically detailed robbery itself (in which an umbrella and fire extinguisher are as essential to success as more specialised safecracking tools) is still as gripping as a machine-tightened thumbscrew, and so memorable that it's easy to forget the merits of the bookending acts.

Jean Servais carries much of the film as world-weary ex-con Tony le Stéphanois, whose relationship with his ex-girlfriend Mado (Marie Sabouret) is an example of the unsentimental



Transport of delight: 'Night Flight'

NEW RELEASES

← ruthlessness with which Dassin infuses all his characters – and also the fatally flawed humanity that they can't quite suppress outside working hours.

Disc: One of the best black-and-white high-definition presentations to date, the Blu-ray picture is a silky marvel, though the DVD is also a marked improvement on previous releases. Good extras include a well-structured analysis by *S&S* contributor Ginette Vincendeau, two archive interviews with Dassin (both exclusive to the Blu-ray) and a generous booklet including former British censor John Trevelyan's soul-searching about whether the film broke cardinal BBFC rules about depicting crimes too realistically. (MB)

Skidoo

Otto Preminger; US 1968; Olive Films/Region 1; 98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1

Film: *Skidoo* is a movie but also works as a verb. When an otherwise formidable artist egregiously oversteps the boundaries of their established abilities, they can be said to have 'skidoed'. It is also, I fear, a lyric: "Skidoo-in-boppin'-beep-beep," Carol Channing scats, wearing Continental Army garb over a miniskirt, unleashing the Harry Nilsson-penned theme song, a terrible sound that never leaves one once heard.

The idea behind *Skidoo* is actually touching. Otto Preminger, Hollywood's most feared on-set dictator, began his independent producer-director career in hard pursuit of publicity-generating novelty, from the controversial subject-matter of *The Man with the Golden Arm* to *Saint Joan's* international talent hunt. Then, mellowed by age and newly close to his young-adult son, Otto decides at age 63 to let down his non-existent hair and try a musical comedy flattering contemporary youth culture. I prefer to think a softening of heart was responsible, not a softening of mind, but *Skidoo* might be explained as the first warning of the Alzheimer's that, according to many confidants, eventually took Preminger's life, though it is only three years removed from the superb *Bunny Lake Is Missing* and *In Harm's Way*, with late rally *Such Good Friends* still ahead.

Preminger rounded up a big, unhip celebrity-roast of a cast: Channing, Groucho Marx, Mickey Rooney, Frankie Avalon, assorted *Batman*-villain cronies and Jackie Gleason, huge and confused, who sweats and gibbers through his prison acid-trip scene. Gleason's suburban ex-mobster is tapped for one last hit by capo 'God' (Marx); infiltrating a prison to pull the job, he's pursued by his daughter and wife (Alexandra Hay and Channing) and a coterie of gruellingly groovy peaceniks. Much lip-service is

Pitch perfect: 'Taking Off'



All at sea: 'Skidoo'

paid to love, but there's no trace of recognisable carnality to be found. Amid the broad laughless gulches, there are unhappy reminders that this is a musical: the 'trash-can ballet' is literally the worst thing ever put on film. A friend confessed she'd somehow conflated *Skidoo* in her memory with another generational tourism story, *Joe* (1969), probably on account of a subconscious desire for Peter Boyle to come after the cast with a .22. A rightly infamous catastrophe, and a great way to wrap up house parties.

Disc: No extras, though the Panavision transfer allows for 'enjoyment' of Preminger's toe-dip into split-screen effects. Some furry audio. (NP)

Taking Off

Milos Forman; US 1971; Carlotta/DVD and Blu-Ray/Region 2; 93 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: Milos Forman interview, Jean-Claude Carrière interview, introduction by Luc Lagier

Film: Milos Forman has often described *Taking Off* as his attempt to make a Czech film in America, attributing exactly that working principle to its failure at the US box office. Following his international success with his 1960s films made in Czechoslovakia, *Peter and Pavla* (still in need of a decent DVD release), *A Blonde in Love* and *The Fireman's Ball*, Forman was keen to work in the west and accepted an invitation to make a feature in New York. History intervened in the shape of the revolution of May 1968 (the ensuing closure of the Cannes Festival prevented *The Fireman's Ball*

from being shown) and the Russian invasion of Prague the following summer, which made him determined to continue working outside his homeland. Together with screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, Forman was swept up by the youth counterculture of New York, and planned a film on teenage runaways, only to discover that the kids proved rather boring subjects; far more interesting were their anxiety-ridden parents. The result was *Taking Off*, a gentle satire on the generation gap, in which desperate couples (in particular Buck Henry and Lynn Carlin) became the principal focus, with their own drink-and-drugs indulgences the cause of major embarrassment.

Forman not only brought his Czech methodology to his direction, using mainly non-professionals and improvising several scenes such as the still hilarious pot-smoking session conducted by the 'Society for the Parents of Fugitive Children', but also stole from himself. The famous audition sequences (in which can be found such future luminaries as Carly Simon, Kathy Bates and Jessica Harper) are a direct lift from his own 1964 film *Audition*, right down to the montage of different faces singing alternate phrases of a song. Today *Taking Off* is not just a marvellous snapshot of the early 1970s, with Forman's unerring eye for telling faces and offbeat decor and fashion, but also a wonderfully funny and generous film. Of particular note is the sly editing (take a bow, John Carter), which moves fluently back and forth between locations and timeframes, and also the pitch-perfect performances throughout. Forman today may denigrate the film's 'open ending', but it's all of a piece with its pervasive charm.

Disc: Another first-class edition of a 'lost' studio film from French distributor Carlotta, with a beautiful high-definition transfer. The French subtitles are removable. The Forman interview, which provides a very detailed background to the film, is in English, but Carrière and Luc Lagier speak in French and there are no subtitles. (DT)

Who Can Kill a Child?

Narciso Ibáñez Serrador; Spain 1976; Eureka/Region 2; Certificate 18; 107 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: video interviews with director and cinematographer

Film: What would happen if the world's children suddenly decided, in unison, to wreak revenge for the atrocities adults have visited on them throughout history – war, famine, genocide? This is the striking premise – illustrated by one of the most harrowing opening credits sequences in the history of cinema – of *Who Can Kill a Child?*, Spanish director Narciso Ibáñez Serrador's second (and last) feature film, which followed his other pitch-perfect horror classic *The House That Screamed*.

Made in 1976, when Franco's deathbed was still warm, *Who Can Kill a Child?* twists the dictator's most cherished 'treasures' – the sun, tourism, the exoticism of his 'Spain is different' tagline – into signifiers of menace for Tom and Evelyn, a young English couple on holiday in the quiet seclusion of the fictional Almanzora (in reality a mélange of Toledo and Menorca).

Serrador (or Chicho as everyone in Spain affectionately knows him) transforms every aspect of this postcard spot into a relentlessly claustrophobic Buñuelian horror, complete with arguably the creepiest kids ever seen on screen. The film is ravishingly shot by Almodóvar's regular cinematographer José Luis Alcaine, and Chicho's trademark focus on ordinary details reaps dividends: the horror and strangeness are magnified – as in Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) – by their gradual emergence in an everyday milieu.

Although the film's manifest political charge is rooted in the horrors of Spain's recent history, *Who Can Kill a Child?* goes beyond the local, referencing the Vietnam War and the Holocaust to create a remarkably powerful, universal anti-war statement. The film rapidly acquired cult status, and its script was to become both a novel and a clear influence on movies such as *Children of the Corn* (1984) and *The Children* (1980). Not long afterwards, Chicho established himself as the guru of television horror, the medium in which he's worked ever since, helping to generate an explosion of horror talent in Spanish cinema and TV in more recent years.

Disc: A sumptuous transfer of the uncut full version which retains the glowing intensity of the 1970s Eastmancolor stock. The DVD includes fascinating interviews with the director and cinematographer. (MDD)

This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, Michael Brooke, Dylan Cave, Graham Fuller, Mar Diestro-Dópido, Geoffrey Macnab, Nick Pinkerton, Kate Stables and David Thompson

Beauty and the Beast – Season 1

Witt-Thomas Productions/Republic/
Ron Koslow/CBS; US 1987-88;
Fabulous Films/Region 2; 1.072 minutes;
Certificate PG; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features:
image gallery, 'The Story of Beauty and
the Beast' retrospective documentary

Programme: The first episode of this update on the familiar fairytale immediately lays out its unabashedly romantic intentions with a scene-setting title card informing viewers that it is "Once upon a time in the city of New York". Though striving for a timeless, otherworldly quality, you know it's the 1980s when the tall dark stranger and the leading lady compete to see who has the broadest shoulder pads and biggest hairdo.

Bored young socialite Catherine (Linda Hamilton) is attacked late one night and left for dead, but is saved by Vincent, a Byronic man-beast who dwells in tunnels deep beneath the urban sprawl. Nursed back to health in his secret lair, Catherine opts to return topside as a crusading champion for the downtrodden and disenfranchised, bound through a psychic link to her loving saviour (an ideal bit of casting for the physically imposing and baritone-voiced Ron Perlman).

Unusual as a primetime fantasy genre piece focusing on poetic sentiment rather than action and adventure, the show also makes pleasing nods to Cocteau, both in Rick Baker's highly impressive leonine prosthetic makeup and the *Orphée*-like split between two worlds – one above of consumerist delights shrouded by chrome-blue nightmares, and Vincent's ethereal amber-hued utopia below. The blend of romance and fantasy is at its best in the scripts by *A Song of Ice and Fire* author George R.R. Martin, most notably 'Masques', in which Vincent is able to spend a romantic interlude with Catherine out in the open without disguise during the carnival atmosphere of Halloween. **Discs:** Shot on film but edited on tape, so further emphasising the soft-focus photography, this series looks reasonably good on DVD, though darker scenes can be grainy in the extreme. A brief featurette offers little other than new interviews with Hamilton and Perlman. (SA)

Jemima Shore Investigates

Thames TV/ITV; UK 1983; Network DVD/
Region 2; 609 minutes; Certificate 12;
Aspect Ratio 4:3

Programme: Graham Greene labelled his thrillers mere 'entertainments', and Julian Barnes opted for a pseudonym for his spicy adventures featuring bisexual detective Duffy – but there's many an author who has taken a detour through the crime-mystery genre en route to literary respectability. Lady Antonia Fraser has fared better than most, as her excursions – a series of well-plotted feminist-inflected



Stressed Eric An ode to schadenfreude and the comedy potential of hypertension... at times downright Cronenbergian in its malevolence

novels featuring glamorous TV reporter Jemima Shore – have been feathered throughout her more celebrated work as a historian. The stories quickly made the transition to the small screen with Maria Aitken as Shore in a spooky 1978 adaptation of 'Quiet as a Nun', an *Armchair Thriller* serial (available separately on DVD) that scared a generation of delighted younger viewers with a barnstorming finale featuring a spectral faceless murderer in a wimple.

The subsequent weekly series, set in the colourful worlds of high fashion, moviemaking and haute cuisine, never quite manages to reach the memorably gothic heights of its predecessor, even though it finds another suitably top-drawer leading lady in Patricia Hodge. Despite contributions from such expert practitioners of television crime as Philip Mackie and Jeremy Paul, many of the episodes are in fact a bit dull, as the show struggles to establish a successful formula, often bogged down by unconvincing attempts to impose old-fashioned mystery plots on topical storylines. But at its best, such as in a pair of stories by Simon Brett, it combines decent plots with a waspish sense of humour. Without question the standout episode is 'Doctor Ziegler's Casebook'; blessed with an intricate script by Christopher Wicking and a charismatic performance from Tom Baker, it has a great time with its story of a psychiatrist who comes to regret dabbling in regression therapy when a patient starts believing he was once Jack the Ripper.

Discs: The slightly washed-out and gauzy look of the video presented here is a fair representation of how the show was originally broadcast. There are no extras. (SA)

The Kingdom I & II

Lars von Trier/Morton Arnfred; Denmark
1994/97; Second Sight/Region 2;
Certificate 18; 573 minutes total;
Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features:
documentaries ('Tranceformer',
'In Lars von Trier's Kingdom'), selected
scene commentaries, TV commercials

Programme: Returning to all eight episodes of this now classic supernatural horror-comedy TV series for the first time since its debut, what's most immediately striking is how genuinely unhinged they seem. Their ultra-grainy handheld cinematography and *Breathless*-style jump-cut editing (like Godard before her, editor Molly Stensgård removed anything that didn't directly propel the narrative) defied the technical and aesthetic conservatism of most mainstream television, something graphically illustrated by the US remake *Kingdom Hospital* (2004), whose own incidental pleasures were undermined by having to adhere much more closely to the rules.

The Kingdom is Denmark's biggest hospital in real life, and one wonders whether management even glanced at the scripts before granting permission, given that the hospital's only level-headed employees seem to be the basement dishwashers (both with Down's syndrome) who provide a running commentary on proceedings. Everyone else could fuel an entire psychiatric conference singlehandedly, whether it's the irascible Swedish neurosurgeon Dr Stig Helmer, his dangerously complacent boss, the pathologist obsessed with a rare liver cancer, the junior doctor-cum-black marketer dealing in medical equipment and human organs, or the hypnotist who replaces an anaesthetist

shortly before a patient's cranium is excavated – and that's without spiritualist patient Mrs Drusse (Kirsten Rolffes) delving into the hospital's traumatic history and helping to unleash its long-buried ghosts. The first half (*The Kingdom* in cinemas) remains stronger than the second (*The Kingdom II*), with the latter sidelining the supernatural elements in favour of outrageous black comedy, bureaucratic satire and the antics of the irreplaceable Ernst-Hugo Järegård as Helmer, one of television's great comic monsters. His death in 1998 killed the series off too.

Discs: "We did all kinds of things to make it look terrible," confesses von Trier in one of the commentaries, confirming that the resoundingly lo-fi picture comes across exactly as intended. Unlike earlier releases, the episodes are presented in their original broadcast form, with catch-up montages and von Trier's self-consciously devilish closing monologues. Generous extras include two von Trier portraits (*Tranceformer* and *In Lars von Trier's Kingdom*, the latter covering his 1990s output in general), commentaries on selected scenes by von Trier, Stensgård and co-writer Neils Vørsel (those offended by von Trier's notorious 2011 Cannes press conference will find the moment when he discusses directing the basement 'mongols' equally cringeworthy) and a bizarre collection of TV commercials for Danish tabloid *Ekstra Bladet*, most featuring Järegård gleefully capitalising on his newfound notoriety. (MB)

Stressed Eric

Absolutely/Klasky Csupo/BBC; UK
1998-2000; 2 entertain/Region 2;
412 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect
Ratio 4:3/16:9; Features: 'The Story
of Stressed Eric', 'Drawing the Characters
with Stig Bergqvist', audio commentaries,
animatic of 'Nativity' episode, trailers,
storyboard PDF

Programme: Eric Feeble emerges as the loveless bastard child of Basil Fawlty and Victor Meldrew in this ode to schadenfreude and the comedy potential of hypertension. This late-1990s weekly half-hour animation sitcom (a British TV first) mercilessly charts Eric's constant and disempowering failures as a single parent, the soul-destroying condescension he endures at the hands of his Mr and Mrs Perfect neighbours ("Hello Eric, how art thou?") and his relentless belittling at the office. Eric's unreleased anxiety leaves him teetering permanently on the verge of syncope, and he is branded with his own distinctive stigmata: a vicious throbbing vein in his temple that at times is downright Cronenbergian in its malevolence. hilariously cruel.

Discs: This set includes both seasons of the sitcom, which technically takes a leap forward in the second year when it shifts from the dowdy 4:3 aspect ratio to the splendours of widescreen. (SA)

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Mask behind the masks

There was far more to Boris Karloff than horror, discovers **Kim Newman**

Boris Karloff: More Than a Monster
The Authorised Biography

By Stephen Jacobs, Tomahawk Press, 568pp, £25, ISBN 9780955767043

Modern horror films often open with high-impact screaming and mutilation, then a 'some time earlier' caption to introduce to-be-imperilled/dismembered characters in calmer times. Modern biographies follow suit: bumping the ancestry/birth/childhood chapter with a pithy prologue highlighting a moment in the subject's life that this particular biographer has latched on to as significant. Stephen Jacobs doesn't start with, say, Karloff's casting as the Monster in 'Frankenstein' (1931). He begins on the night in 1957 when the actor – born William Henry Pratt – was surprised and annoyed, even horrified, to find himself the subject of 'This Is Your Life'.

Repeatedly, Jacobs quotes people who worked with Karloff saying much the same thing: knowing him only through monstrous screen roles (though he played many avuncular or genial characters), they were surprised to meet a benign, cricket-loving English gent. The thing about the 'This Is Your Life' incident, as Jacobs points out, is that this was a rare moment when the mask behind the masks slipped.

There were many things that Karloff did not wish to come up: his mixed-race origins (an Anglo-Indian, he passed off his natural skin tone as a California suntan); how many times he'd been married; or the fact that not one but two members of his immediate family had been tried for murder. In the event, the most telling moment of embarrassment was to Karloff's credit: his attempt to keep good works quiet because of an old-fashioned belief that charity was an obligation for the successful, not a means to further celebrity.

Since Peter Underwood's 'Karloff: The Life of Boris Karloff' (aka 'The Horror Man') in 1972, there have been several biographies, each unearthing more details (and wives) and filling in more blanks. Jacobs digs deeper than previous writers, building on the work of Gregory William Mank ('Karloff and Lugosi: The Story of a Haunting Collaboration', 1990) and Scott Allen Nollen ('Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life', 1999). He gives us more about the extensive and interesting Pratt family (one reason they were against young Billy going on the stage was the scandal of his brother George, a sometime actor whose explanation of how he came to shoot his male flatmate dead was accepted by a jury in 1897, but will lead anyone who reads it now to quite different conclusions) and Karloff's



Revealed: Boris Karloff in make-up as the Monster in 'Frankenstein'

long pre-Hollywood period as a stock-company player in the Canadian wilds.

In covering the film career, Jacobs is on more familiar ground, and holds back from much analysis of Karloff's craft. Familiar patronising snippets from contemporary reviews serve to underline how generally useless the press were in assessing popular forms like horror, and there's little consideration of the extensive criticism even minor Karloff credits (1933's 'The Ghoul', say, or 1936's 'The Invisible Ray') has attracted over the years. In giving equal attention to Karloff's stage, radio, record and television work, Jacobs shows how versatile he really was. In the 1950s, when all the movies could offer him were walk-throughs like 'Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' (1953), he played a wide variety of roles in other media, including Kurtz in a live TV 'Hearts of Darkness' (1958).

Extracts from letters to his family show Karloff's disgust with McCarthyism

The book covers the actor's perhaps surprising leftist views, but doesn't quite draw connections between debilitating injuries suffered on sets and his tireless, not risk-free campaigning for the improvement of actors' conditions. Extracts from letters to his politically connected British family show his frequent disgust with American politics (especially McCarthyism), hinting at why he never took American citizenship.

Because Karloff worked hard at his reticence, this biography has a hard task. He never talked about his race, even off the record – so we don't know if he was nervous when cast, as he sometimes was, as an Indian or Middle Easterner (if 'exposed', he wouldn't have been able to kiss a white woman on screen without his films being picketed in the South). Jacobs mentions the many marriages (and cohabitations) and break-ups, the estrangement from his only child and frequent frustrations with the type-casting that in public he claimed to be happy with, but this material is still overwhelmed by numberless testimonials to his English charm and decency. A solidly useful, perhaps definitive book; but the mask is still in place.

FURTHER READING

Born in Flames:
A Film by
Lizzie Borden

Edited by Kaisa Lassinaro, Occasional Papers, 32pp, £10, ISBN 9780956260598

Lizzie Borden's 1983 film *Born in Flames* is the definition of an underground cult classic. The first avowedly feminist and anti-racist science-fiction film, it met the fate of many feminist films: often made on low-to-no budget, filmed on the fly and distributed by small community groups, they were written about avidly by academics but have long been unavailable. Even more directly than Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979), *Born in Flames* is about feminist activists taking control of the media to spread their message – the film climaxes with the radical women of Radio Regazza and Radio Phoenix taking over the World Trade Center transmission tower. So it's a heavy irony that the film itself has been marginalised.

Eighteen years after its release, *Born in Flames* is back, not on DVD but in the form of a photo-graphic novel that offers a strong sense of the film's raw, kinetic energy. Using a dynamic selection of stills, balancing close-ups and action shots, layout artist Kaisa Lassinaro finds an innovative form in which to evoke the moving pictures, while radicalising another medium in the process. In so doing, Occasional Papers have created a promising hybrid of graphic novel and script book that can make 'lost' films available again – which is particularly significant for a film that takes a stand on activism by any media necessary.

This is a telling time for the reappearance of *Born in Flames*: last year Kathryn Bigelow, who plays a newspaper editor in the film, became the first woman to win the Best Director Oscar; and this March, US musicians Invincible, Jean Grae and Tamar-Kali took their *Born in Flames* tour to the SXSW festival. As timely as ever, the film focuses its wit and intelligence on women's inventive resistance. Set in a future present "ten years after the social democratic wars of liberation", it shows the arguments and actions of female activists who come to question whether "oppression against women will be eliminated under any kind of social system" – as Borden herself wrote in the *Heresies* magazine article included with this book. ♦ **Sophie Mayer**



Call to arms: 'Born in Flames'

100 Silent Films

By Bryony Dixon, BFI Palgrave Macmillan, 288pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781844573080

Only 20 years ago, the list of titles selected for *100 Silent Films* would have looked very different from how it appears today in Bryony Dixon's handsome survey of the first four decades of cinema. Mindful of the growing interest in non-fiction, newsreels, travelogues, home movies and advertising as documents of early 20th-century society, Dixon makes good use of her working experience at the BFI National Archive and her long-time acquaintance with Pordenone's Giornate del Cinema Muto, a shrine for silent-cinema aficionados; as a result, D.W. Griffith's 1915 epic *The Birth of a Nation* stands alongside *The Birth of a Flower*, a 1910 short featuring crocuses and lilies in slow-motion bloom.

Dixon's strategy is to present "a range of classic titles, together with more unexpected choices" aimed at making her book "a welcoming and inspiring introduction for the general reader". Her goal is in fact more ambitious, as the book tries to reconcile multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives under a holistic vision of silent-film history; while not intending to be "exhaustively representative", she would like the book to be "a brief history of cinema in 100 films"; she repudiates the "best of" approach "without ignoring the classics". She also doesn't want to "isolate films in their national silos", but makes no amends for the extra space allotted to British cinema ("this is principally my field," she writes, "and this is a British book").



Early flowering: the short 'The Birth of a Flower' is one of the lesser-known entries

In this sense, *100 Silent Films* is a fine balancing act between cinephilia, scholarship, education and archival expertise. Rather than a fervent plea for how powerful silent cinema can be, this is an orderly, lucid explanation of how to view it as a complex cultural phenomenon. Though it's neither cautious nor detached in the overall tone, emotional neutrality is nevertheless its mantra.

The icons of silent cinema still retain the relative majority of seats in the book's carefully gathered coalition. One third of the titles in the 100 have been nominated in *Sight & Sound*'s 'top ten' polls between 1952 and 2002; more than half are held in preservation copies

by at least ten major institutions; 31 of them are among the 100 most collected works in film archives worldwide.

The role played by these organisations in defining the cinematic canon has not yet been adequately assessed. In their formative years, members of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) were – in varying degrees and with different motivations – committed to lending prints to each other; however, many of them were striving to build their own canon of cinema through acquisition, duplication and exchange of copies with fellow organisations. In this sense, curators were behaving to some extent as collectors: an archive holding the best

or only extant print of a recognised classic would eventually trade a copy of it for the sake of obtaining another landmark film owned by a fellow institution.

The ensuing process of diffusion and growth of the silent-film heritage is nothing short of astonishing. Back in 1962, the first comprehensive list of surviving silents compiled by FIAF archives included 1,977 features; today, the most authoritative internet source on the subject – FIAF's Treasures from the Film Archives – is about to reach the landmark of 50,000 extant silent films, a figure scarcely imaginable only a couple of decades ago.

Compared with earlier film dictionaries for non-specialists, *100 Silent Films* benefits from this wealth of largely unseen material: a quarter of its titles come from what is now called 'early cinema' (as opposed to the patronising label of 'primitive'), from its early days to 1915; there are 16 entries on non-fiction films, and one welcome addition of a recent production (the Canadian maverick Guy Maddin's 2000 short *The Heart of the World*). Errors are few and of minor consequence, and Dixon's writing is remarkably clear and jargon-free.

Given the book's manifest British identity, it would have been fair to include India as a component of its colonial past. Together with the marginal presence of women filmmakers, this is the only notable omission in an otherwise impeccable book. It's easy to predict it will have a long, useful life on undergraduate courses. ♦♦ Paolo Cherchi Usai

The Films of James Bridges

By Peter Tonguetto, McFarland, 212pp, £39.50, ISBN 9780786439492

Peter Tonguetto is an Orson Welles specialist best known for *Orson Welles Remembered* (reviewed in *S&S* April 2008), a collection of interviews dealing with some less-researched areas of Welles' career. So it's surprising to discover that he has now turned his attention to James Bridges (1936-1993), a seldom-discussed director who made a handful of films – including *The Baby Maker* (1970), *The China Syndrome* (1978) and *Perfect* (1985) – which are now mostly forgotten. (Indeed, when Tonguetto first mentioned this project to me in an email, I initially assumed he had made a typing error, and was actually working on a book about Jeff Bridges, which at least seemed less unlikely.)

As Tonguetto writes of James Bridges, "no critic ever took up his cause", and in this groundbreaking book he subjects each of the director's eight films to close scrutiny, supported by quotations from newly conducted interviews with friends and collaborators, notably his long-term partner Jack Larson. Tonguetto makes little of Bridges's

homosexuality; while this matter-of-fact approach corresponds with today's more tolerant attitudes, it hardly suggests the prejudice Bridges must have encountered as perhaps the only openly gay filmmaker working in Hollywood during the 1970s – something that might explain the slimness of his filmography. (He also wrote a large number of unproduced scripts, and according to Tonguetto actually turned down the chance to direct high-profile projects including *Summer of '42*, *Carrie* and *Working Girl*.)

Tonguetto draws attention to the fact that many of Bridges's films were based on personal experience, so it's notable that – aside from some peripheral figures in *Bright Lights*, *Big City* (1988) – only one of them, *Mike's Murder* (1984), includes a homosexual character. It's also interesting that his work fluctuates between liberal and conservative positions: *The Paper Chase* (1973), at least until its

unconvincing climax, is implicitly critical of those young American drop-outs who rejected mainstream society, while Robin Wood identified *Urban Cowboy* (1980) as an example of Reaganite anti-feminism (though the film still seems valuable for its humanist refusal to take a

condescending attitude towards working-class leisure activities).

While not denying that Bridges was a contradictory individual,

Tonguetto prefers to emphasise the director's mastery of classical filmmaking techniques. Tonguetto's meticulous analyses of individual sequences from the films are



'September 30, 1955'

distinguished by an unashamed passion (he describes a close-up in *The Baby Maker* as "almost Bressonian", and can barely restrain his enthusiasm for the 1977 film *September 30, 1955*, at one point commenting simply: "what dialogue!"; in fact he comes remarkably close to justifying his admiration. In the end, I wasn't quite convinced that Bridges is as important a figure as Tonguetto believes him to be, the two films for which he makes the most extravagant claims – *September 30, 1955* and *Mike's Murder* – being interesting but ultimately minor works.

Nonetheless, Tonguetto is to be applauded for his determination to rescue filmmakers from what he perceives as undeserved neglect (while referring in passing to James Ivory's *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*, he describes it as "one of the high points in American film in the 1990s"). This book is a laudable attempt to carve out genuinely new territory; despite its absurd cover price, it is highly recommended to anyone interested in this vibrantly energetic period of American filmmaking. Tonguetto's next book, a study of Peter Bogdanovich, is eagerly awaited. ♦♦ Brad Stevens



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After the fact

It's curious the government should launch an independent film policy review after a number of crucial decisions have already been taken (UKFC's disbandment, BFI's ascendancy, establishment of Creative England etc). That's just the sort of temporal disjunction Marty McFly might appreciate ('The Future's Back', *S&S*, July).

Be that as it may, one dispiriting aspect of the review is the absence from the panel of anyone of experience or repute from the world of education; this despite film education's appearance in the review's terms of reference (albeit hitched to the narrow utility of increasing "audience demand for film"). Since Professor John Hill left the UKFC board a few years back, no one with an education background has been involved in high-level strategy. For sure, film education has its champions, but the review panel would have benefited from someone who could explain that film education is not reducible to audience development.

Jim Barratt

By email

Making the cut

It was gratifying to read the article by Michael Atkinson reassessing *Cutter's Way* (*S&S*, July). It is a film I have loved and championed for many years. Why it should have been overlooked for so long, both critically and commercially, is a mystery to me. It has a unique and strong central character, substantial elements of intrigue and the requisite love interest. Perhaps the underlying theme of corporate greed and unrestrained power sweeping aside the 'little' man did not sit well with those who promoted the film.

Whatever the reasons, the film deserves its rerelease and the re-evaluation that Michael provided. Hopefully this article will not just be a one-off, but will be followed by a series of critical reappraisals of other neglected classics.

Nigel Messenger

By email

A girl and a gun: 'The Guns of Fort Petticoat'



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Celluloid velvet

I was delighted to see that Miki Takashi's *13 Assassins* (right) was made 'film of the month' (*S&S*, June). However, I felt the need to point out a mistake made within Christoph Huber's (otherwise excellent) review. Huber applauds Miki's "dark, cool yet velvety digital palette". It should be noted that *13 Assassins* was in fact shot on 35mm. I think this basic yet significant error is indicative of a number of things. Firstly, that many cinema chains – indeed ones that tend to brand themselves as 'arthouse' establishments (such as the Curzon Renoir, where I saw the film) – frequently use digital projection regardless of the film's original format. The upshot of digital projection is that it does often make it quite difficult to establish what the film was originally shot on, since all the grain fluctuation and entropy are eradicated – leaving the sterile flatness that is so characteristic of digital filmmaking.

The other issue that is highlighted in such cases is the misconception of the extent to which celluloid has (so far) been maligned by digital



technology. It is my impression that most major studios and mainstream filmmakers, unless using 3D, still prefer shooting on film. Whilst the anxiety that many scholars and critics express over the obsolescence of celluloid is warranted, I feel it must not be assumed that it is only the esoteric appreciator of

film who will miss it; the more mainstream quarters of the film industry have so far proved surprisingly reluctant to abandon the dark, cool – and sometimes velvety – celluloid palette.

Nicholas Sutton
London

Eight samurai

I've read with interest the comments on the curtailment of credits in the magazine (Letters, *S&S*, June). While you've explained the thinking behind it, you haven't really explained how this is going to look going forward. If the June issue is the first of this new credits regime, I'm a bit disappointed. At the front of the Reviews section it still said "full credits", so maybe you should replace that. Most of the changes appear OK, though there should be a rethink on the order of credits – eg, different producer credits could appear together.

The worrying bit is the cast lists being too short. If you look at the one for *13 Assassins*, you could only count about eight assassins before it stops. Surely you could at least have listed the extra five names? When you then look at how this has actually been laid out in the magazine, you cringe – nice white space on the right column, of almost exactly the size of five cast members!

Patrick Gordon-Brown

By email

Operation petticoat

In his piece 'Go West, Young Woman' (*S&S*, May), Edward Buscombe is doubtless correct in asserting that in the 19th century women did not, on the whole, go rushing around on horseback shooting at Indians. In films they sometimes come into action when there are not enough men, typically reloading guns while the men do the shooting.

Perhaps mention

should have been made of George Marshall's *The Guns of Fort Petticoat* (1956), where the Texan women (including a black woman), whose menfolk are off at the Civil War, successfully defend an abandoned mission against Comanche attack – once Northern deserter Audie Murphy has convinced them of the danger and licked them into shape.

Stephen J. Greenhill

By email

Over the wall

Thanks for the interesting feature about William F. Buckley Jr's talk show *Firing Line* (DVDs, *S&S*, May). The final paragraph contained a 1969 Rowan and Martin joke about "President Ronald Reagan" being in office at the time of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall that *didn't* actually come to pass in the end. 'Ray Gun' did his "Mister Gorbachev, tear down this wall" shtick in 1987, then left office in January 1989. When the wall came down in late 1989, the Idiot Son's Father was minding the shop, being almost a quarter of the way through his one and only term.

Steven Hughes

By email

Special relationship

Hollywood's domination of the film industry has long been a bone of contention, but Kieron Boote's letter (*S&S*, June) overstates the case to a hysterical degree. Europeans (and that includes us Brits) will no doubt be surprised to learn that our entire cultural heritage has been obliterated by our friends across the pond. But since Mr Boote has chosen to broaden his diatribe

to that extent, he should realise that the cultural relationship between Europe and the USA is – and always has been – a far more complex affair than he is prepared to allow.

Returning to the solely cinematic, there seems to be an implication of the innate superiority of European cinema over American junk. That much of American cinema is junk is undeniable, and we tend to get it all. The real difference is that Europe keeps its equally plentiful junk at home. We get what is deemed to be the cream of the crop. And come next year, when *S&S* publishes its ten-yearly 'best movies of all time' poll, will there be a healthy representation of American films in the mix? Of course there will.

Les Hooper

Glasgow

Knock on wood

Perhaps Tony Rayns (Letters, *S&S*, May) should learn to be more forgiving of the errors of others, for in his letter he also misidentified the Japanese actor in the photo that ran with the *Norwegian Wood* review (*S&S*, April). The actor is not Tamayama Tetsuji, as Rayns insists, but rather Kora Kengo, who played the role of Kizuki, Watanabe's high-school friend who commits suicide.

Giovanni Fazio

Film Critic, 'The Japan Times'

Additions & corrections

July p.57 *The Big Picture*, Cert 15, 115m 20s, 10,380 ft +0 frames; p.60 *Countdown to Zero*, Cert PG, 89m 19s, 8,038 ft +8 frames; p.62 *Donor Unknown*, Cert 12A, 80m 15s, 7,222 ft +8 frames; p.69 *Mammuth*, Cert 15, 91m 13s, 8,210 ft +4 frames

READER OFFERS see page 24 for details

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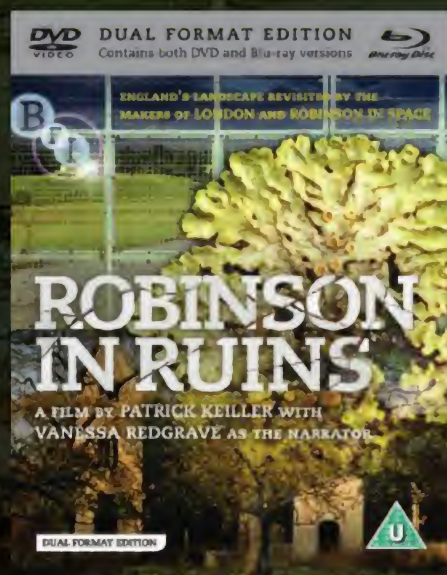
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